

IN A
CHESHIRE
GARDEN

G. TIGERTON-WARBURTON



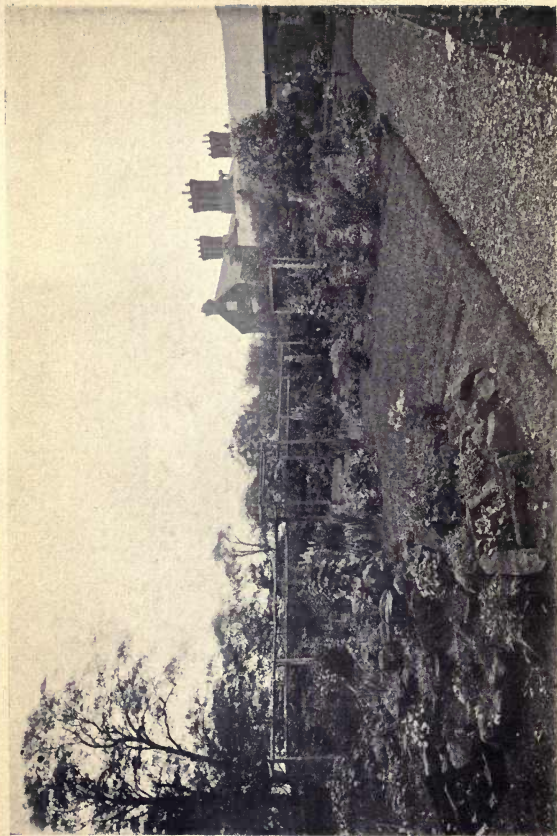
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In a Cheshire Garden





The Flower Garden.

In a Cheshire Garden

Natural History Notes

BY

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Rector of Warburton.

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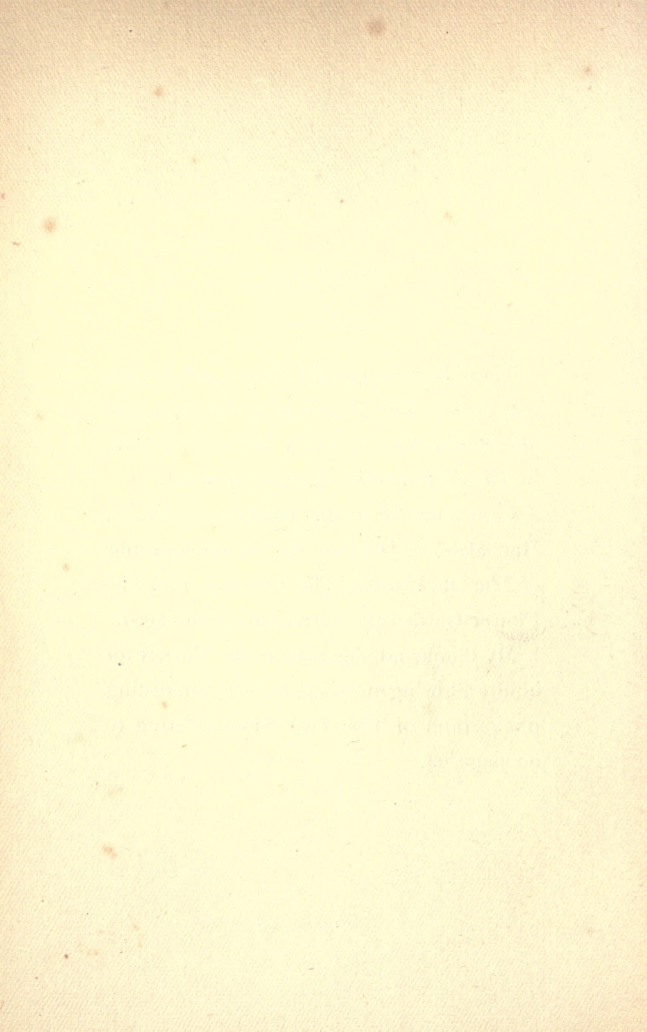
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PREFACE.

These Notes appeared from April to June this year in *The Warrington Guardian* and afterwards came out in a de-localised form in *The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel*.

I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. P. Ramsdale, of Heatley, for the photographs of The Old Church, The Yew-tree, and The Flower Garden (as it was some years ago).

My thanks are due also to Mr. Garrett for kindly allowing me to use his very interesting photograph of The Two Nests referred to on page 94.



CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. Introductory - - - - - -	I.
II. Weeds and Alien Plants - - - -	5
III. Birds—Thrushes - - - - -	11
IV. Chats, Robins, and Warblers - - -	26
V. Tits and Wrens - - - - -	37
VI. Wagtails, Flycatchers, Swallows, and other Insect-eaters - - - - -	46
VII. Sparrows and other Finches - - -	57
VIII. Finches, Starlings, and Crows - - -	67
IX. Other Birds- - - - - -	77
X. British Mammals - - - - -	95
XI. Dogs and Cats - - - - -	103
Index - - - - - -	113



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Flower Garden	-	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>
							FACE PAGE
Old Church	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
The Old Yew	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
The Sundial	-	-	-	-	-	-	38
A Corner in the Garden with Allium Dioscorides	-						55
Two Nests	-	-	-	-	-	-	70
The Foodstand	-	-	-	-	-	-	87

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Although much of the neighbourhood has become semi-urban and any idea of rural seclusion is destroyed, at least in summer, by the crowds that find their way to it from Manchester and other large towns, yet the Cheshire village of Warburton in which this garden is situated is a real country place still. How long it will remain so is another thing. One salt works has been set up at Heatley about a mile away and we are now (1912) promised another, while there is every prospect of land being let for works in Warburton itself. Who knows, in a few years perhaps the whole place may be reduced to the desolation of another Widnes. Then, when it has become a rare thing to find even a blade of grass on the dreary black waste or to see any bird but a grimy sparrow, a record of what was once here may be strange reading.

The garden itself about which I write is quite on the northern boundary of Cheshire, in old days divided from Lancashire by the Mersey only. The soil is light and sandy, not far from the rock in places and in places with water at a very little depth below the surface. It is well suited to hollies and rhododendrons, both of which grow abundantly and luxuriantly, as also do yews.

There are a good number of ordinary deciduous trees, chiefly on the old bank of the river, such as oak, sycamore, chestnut, birch, beech, and alder, but no conifers of any age except one or two Scotch firs. There is one flourishing deadara which I planted myself and a few young Austrian pines that seem to be doing well.

A spruce fir that I once planted behaved in an extraordinary way; instead of growing straight, it shot up in a zigzag fashion, the leading shoot one year going off at an angle of 60 degrees or so, and the next year harking back and starting in the opposite direction at about the same angle.

Few of the trees can be more than 80 years old. I think most of them would have been planted by my father, who was rector from 1833 to 1849. There is however a remarkable old yew in the adjoining churchyard. The half of it, just below where the branches spring, measures nearly nine feet round. The other half has entirely gone, so has practically the whole of the substance, the wood of the trunk, and what is left of the still standing side is little more than a shell with a coating of bark. Notwithstanding this there is quite a fair-sized head of leafy young branches (which by the way has greatly increased since I first remember the tree 40 years ago) growing up amidst the ruins of the old far-reaching boughs. These yet

remain to tell something of the wide and grateful shade they once afforded to our "rude forefathers" as on summer Sundays they waited for service to begin, just as I remember the last generation gathered and gossipped under younger yews when this was the Parish Church. This yew is the "thousand-year-old tree" of the clerk's tale to visitors, and if one thinks how many years of slow growth it must have taken to form a trunk of that thickness, say 18 feet in circumference, and how many more for it to have decayed away to its present condition, it does indeed carry us back to an early date in English history when the little green shoot that sprang from the crimson-coated seed first saw the light.

One great drawback from a gardener's point of view is the prevalence of strong, cold, N.-W. winds in spring. The winters are not so severe as they often are further south, but the late spring frosts are sometimes disastrous. We have had potatoes cut down by frost as late as June 21st, but the worst spring frost I have known was in May, 1894, just about the time that Queen Victoria came to Manchester to open the Ship Canal. On three consecutive nights, May 19, 20 and 21, there was frost, and its intensity seemed to increase each night. Not only were potatoes cut, but garden peas and many hardy herbaceous plants and even common

weeds. (I noticed that those with a northern aspect suffered least.) The shoots and buds of roses were scorched, and the young leaves of most trees and shrubs. Hollies suffered especially, but even yew and rhododendron, oak, sycamore, and chestnut did not escape. The only tree that weathered the cold with impunity was the hawthorn, the tenderest leaves and tips of which were not injured. (This was not the case though in the severe frost of Easter 1903.) Royal, male, and lady ferns were shrivelled up to a greater or less degree, but parsley and oak fern were unharmed.

We miss one gardener's friend here, but we escape the attentions of one enemy. Though frogs are common enough, toads are very rare. I remember to have seen only one during all the many years I have known the garden. On the other hand, whilst I have a dim recollection of having once found an old snail-shell, I cannot say for certain that I have ever seen a snail, though of shell-less slugs in all sizes there is no scarcity.

II.

WEEDS AND ALIEN PLANTS.

A slight knowledge of botany adds greatly to the interest of a garden, and is besides often of practical value. With such knowledge, one forms a habit of looking even at weeds with some interest, and this has led to my finding several strange plants among them. I have for example come across the following in the kitchen garden :

“*Saponaria vaccaria*,” with its curious angled calyx and pretty pink flower.

“*Galium tricorné*,” very much like common goose-grass or cleavers, but rare in England, and quite unknown in this neighbourhood.

Annual mercury (closely allied to the common perennial Dog’s mercury), green and dull-looking, only of interest because it is rare.

“*Holosteum umbellatum*,” which again is rare and not much more attractive to the casual observer.

“*Draba muralis*,” allied to “Shepherd’s purse,” and not unlike it, but as rare as that is common.

“*Melilotus officinalis*,” a graceful yellow pea-flower. When this first appeared it was quite a stranger in these parts, but afterwards for several years it was continually turning

up in different corners of the garden, indeed even in 1911, twenty-six years since its first visit, I found a stray specimen.

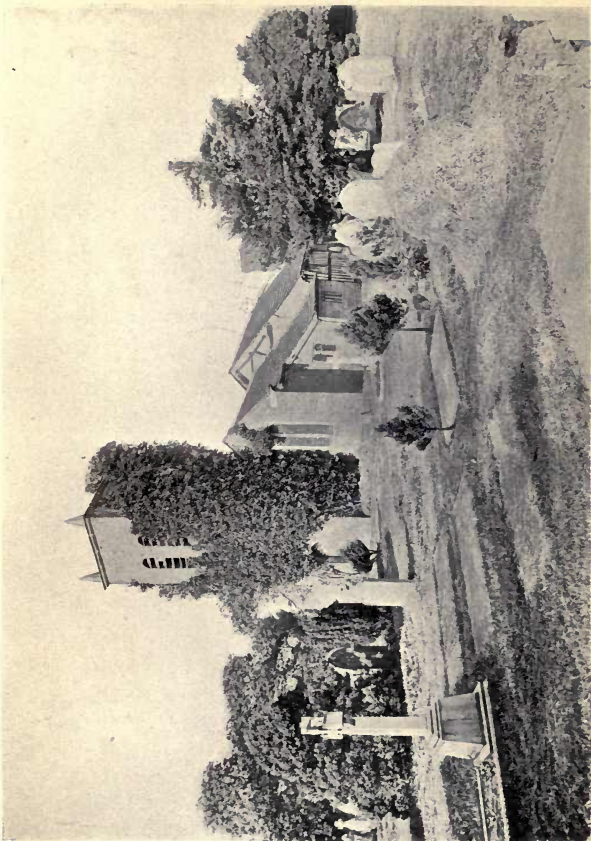
"*Ranunculus arvensis*," a weak-looking buttercup with curious rough seed vessels.

"*Scandix Pecten-Veneris*," an ordinary unattractive umbelliferous plant, but with extraordinary long beaks to the fruit, which are supposed to be like the teeth of a comb. Both of these are I believe common in other parts of the country, but they are unusual here.

"*Poa nemoralis*," a stranger grass of elegant growth, came one year in the rougher part of a rock-border. It was made welcome and kindly treated, but though allowed to follow its own devices and though several seedlings sprang up round it, they were all gone in a year or two. A rarer grass still, "*Setaria glauca*," once turned up in a cucumber frame.

In 1907, a seedling fig came up close to the wall of the house. It has now (1912) several shoots about eight feet long. The same year another seedling fig appeared in the kitchen garden, and that too I have transplanted to a warm corner of the house-wall, where it has made a nice bush.

For several years we have found seedling tomatoes growing in the kitchen garden, and in 1911 we gathered seven pounds of green tomatoes from two plants to make into jam.



Old Church.

When first I came here, and for a long time afterwards, "*Erysimum cheiranthoides*" was always among the kitchen garden weeds, and one year I found growing in a bed of onions its near relative "*Erysimum orientale*," which is quite a rare British plant.

Greater celandine, a rather handsome perennial with somewhat glaucous leaves and bright yellow flowers, used to be an abundant weed on the banks and among the bushes, and is still (1911) to be found in the garden, though in diminished quantity.

In 1889, a strange plant appeared which puzzled me a good deal at first. It was tall and straggling, but had no flowers. Next spring there were several of the same plants, very much branched with something of the habit of a mugwort, and long spikes of flowers at the end of every branch. I discovered it to be a species of "*Ambrosia*," a native of North America, but I soon discovered also that it increased by underground runners in every direction, and was only too thankful to get rid of it.

Two years before, I had found another visitor, this time from South America, with bright yellow flowers, evidently allied to forget-me-not, which proved to be an "*Amsinckia*" (*intermedia*?). There were about 20 plants of this annual in one border and several others in other parts of the garden. With some consideration, but with no par-

ticular care on my part, it has maintained itself in more or less quantity in the same herbaceous border ever since.

In 1897, a single plant of an "Allium" appeared and grew to a height of more than five feet, straight up with very stout stems, one and a half inches in circumference, and handsome heads of reddish-green bell-shaped flowers on drooping stalks, which afterwards, in fruit, became quite straight and upright. I found it to be "*Allium Dioscorides*," a native of Sicily and Sardinia. There were many tubers at the root when I took it up, but none of them ever grew so tall and fine as the original.

One or two plants that I have introduced myself have proved very tiresome weeds. In 1875 or thereabouts, I brought back from the wild part of a large garden in the neighbourhood a balsam with rather a conspicuous yellow flower ("*Impatiens noli-me-tangere*," I think). It made itself at home at once, but as it would keep within no bounds, I have done all I could "to get without it," as they would say here, but it defies me to my face and in spite of relentless persecution, again and again every spring it comes up smiling in an abundant crop.

So indeed does a tall polygonum ("*P. cuspidatum*" I believe it is) that I brought back from the same garden about the same time. It absolutely refuses to budge from

the place where I first allowed it to grow. It does not perpetuate itself by seed like the balsam, but from little odds and ends of rootlets and suckers that hide themselves in the soil.

What I take to be a variety of "*Oxalis corniculata*," a very pretty little thing with dark reddish-brown leaves and deep yellow flowers, is another uncontrollable subject. It is perennial and yet increases by seed as fast as a balsam.

A plant which on the top of a stone wall is very pretty, "*Linaria vulgaris*," has proved a veritable plague to me in the garden. I had it sent to me originally by a nurseryman for the "*Peloria*" variety, and as if the disappointment of that were not enough, it added insult to injury, or rather injury to insult, by running below the surface in a provoking and persevering manner and showing itself in most unexpected places. Although the normal "*vulgaris*" is so irrepressible, I have found "*Peloria*" quite the reverse, and have never been able to keep it above a year or two.

The double-flowered varieties of most plants are, as a rule, more difficult than the ordinary single, but a little *potentilla* ("*rep-tans*" ?) with a yellow ball of double flower has proved an exception here. No single-flowered plant could get over and under the ground faster than this has done.

In 1886, in an out-of-the-way path among trees, an orchid, "*Epipactis latifolia*," came up in the very middle. I took care that it was not disturbed, and found it again in exactly the same place four years later, no sign of it having been seen in the interval. Never before, or since, have I found a plant of that or any other orchis growing wild in the garden.

One year (1887) in a border nearly full of rhododendrons, close to the front door, a curious looking thing made its way above the ground, which, at first sight might have been put down as something between a hyacinth and a lily-of-the-valley, but was said to be "*Muscari comosum*." I had never planted it and during the fifteen years that I had been here had never seen anything like it. I very carefully marked the spot when it died down, but from that time to this (1911) during all the 24 years that have passed it has never shown itself again.

III.

BIRDS—THRUSHES.

You can feel something like affection even for a plant, when you have watched over it and attended to its likes and dislikes as to aspect, soil, moisture, shade and so on, and when it has responded to your care and rewarded you for the pains you have spent upon it, but birds become personal friends, it is an interest and amusement to study their characters and habits, and a delight to listen to their voices. And this friendship is not for any one particular bird (though of course there may be that sometimes), but for the particular species of bird, any one of which that you happen to meet with anywhere seems like an old friend. A lively impudent tomtit for instance is the same amusing companion and it is the same pleasure to hear his cheery note, whether you find him in a suburban garden or in some shady corner of a wood.

Of course it is a day to be marked with a white stone when you come across a new or a rare bird, but if you watch the commonest sympathetically and intelligently you have an endless fund of interest and amusement. The quarrels, the loves, the boldness and ingenuity even of a sparrow may divert your mind pleasantly and help you to put away worries. Then how eagerly in spring does

one listen for the first note of a willow-warbler, what an interest is the first sight of a swallow, and how gladly one welcomes each of our summer visitors as in turn they arrive from passing the winter in the Sahara oases or among our friends in the Transvaal or Cape Colony.

In a country unexplored or newly settled it may not be the same, but in England there is no need to spoil the charm of friendship by use of the collector's gun. All British birds have been so well illustrated and described that it ought to be possible to tell most of them by careful observation without actually having them in one's hand. In the interests of science, to make sure of the discovery of a new species or the distribution of a known one, birds must sometimes be shot (and after all to be shot is a less cruel end than to fall a prey to their natural enemies), but to shoot a well-known bird simply for the sake of its skin is another matter. A man who shoots every rare bird he sees, that he may add it to his private collection, is sacrificing bird-life for his own selfish pleasure and disregarding the sentiments and interests of the great body of nature-lovers and students. The true naturalist does not collect specimens as he would postage stamps; to study the life of a wren in its natural surroundings is more to him than anything he can do with the dried skin of a golden eagle.

They say that there is in Switzerland a law which forbids the shooting of any bird without a licence. If some such law could be enforced here, rare birds that seek hospitality among us would no longer be at the mercy of every idle lout who happens to have a gun. And is it impossible that children might be taught to find pleasure in watching, and not, as seems generally the case now, in destroying life?

We often have a pair of missel-thrushes ("shercocks" in Cheshire) nesting here. Generally they build in a tree at some distance away, where they make their presence known by noisy attacks on other birds; but once they had their nest in a Scotch fir close to the house, and then they were so quiet as almost to escape notice altogether.

There were two nests in the old churchyard this year (1912). One in a Spanish Chestnut was about thirty feet from the ground, in the middle of a clump of little shoots that grew straight up on the top side of a thick branch. This branch overhangs a patch of grass running close to the boundary wall and on this green boys were playing football with much shouting and noise every evening. The nest stood out plainly to be seen, and for a week before they flew (which they did on April 20th) you could easily count all four young ones. The other nest was in a yew, under which there is a seat in summer, and

was simply set on the top of one of the lowest spreading boughs without any attempt at concealment. It was at the end of the bough and not six feet from the ground, within easy reach of anyone. It could, however, only be seen when you were actually under the tree and probably would never have been noticed at all but for the behaviour of the birds themselves. After the eggs were hatched they attacked everybody who went under or even near the tree, swooping down suddenly from you didn't know where and almost dashing into your face, indeed they would often hit your hat. I am glad to say this display of courage was not wasted, for the young birds safely flew on May 17th.

Missel-thrush is said to be short for mistle-toe-thrush, and to mark the singular taste of the bird for mistletoe berries. Mistletoe is scarce with us, but they do appear to depend more upon berries of every kind than either throstles or blackbirds, and one year I remember when the yews bore an extraordinary crop of berries, the trees were quite alive with the missel-thrushes that came to eat them. I would say, by the way, that a great part of the holly berries are sometimes left untouched by birds, and I have seen trees in summer quite red with the berries of the previous year.

One or two missel-thrushes generally come to the food-stand in winter and show them-

selves expert in getting fat from the supposed sparrow-proof receptacles.

Though missel-thrushes are common their song is not familiar. It has been described as much better than a throstle's; I do not know if that is the general opinion. It certainly is simpler without the same repetition, and it has seemed to me more mellow, more like a blackbird's when I have heard it, but that is not often. Throstles will sometimes sing continuously all the winter through, and early in the year I have listened most carefully to catch the notes of their bigger brothers; but only very seldom with success. They have, however, an autumn song which I first noticed at the end of September a good many years ago. I became aware one day of a bird's song that seemed to be sometimes the note of a blackbird, sometimes of a throstle. After listening for several days I came to the conclusion that it must have been one of the many starlings that were singing everywhere, one that had learnt more or less successfully to imitate a throstle. However, I never could make sure, for I never could catch sight of the singer, he would hide himself in a holly or a yew, and would at once stop singing if I went near. At last, one day I heard him at the top of a sycamore which was nearly bare of leaves, and managed to bring a glass to bear on him; even then his body was hidden by a bough and his head

was all that I could see, but the head was plainly that of a thrush. While I watched I could distinctly see him turn his eye down on me, and he was off in an instant; but though I only got a glimpse as he flew away, there was no mistaking the flight of a missel-thrush. It seemed curious to me at the time that he should be singing at all then, and that he should be so shy about it.

Song-thrushes, or throstles as they are called in Cheshire, are always plentiful, but not always to the same extent. They were, for instance, very much thinned in numbers by the hard winter of 1895, but in a couple of years they abounded again, and I heard people complain of their night's rest being spoilt, there were so many and they sang so early and so loud. From April to June they sing almost incessantly, from earliest light until quite dark. They begin at three in the morning, or even earlier, and sing their loudest for about an hour; then there seems somewhat of a lull, but they soon start again in full chorus, and go on singing more or less throughout the day, sometimes until past nine at night. In 1905, on the longest day of the year, I woke at 2-30 a.m. to hear a throstle in full song just outside my window, and at 9-30 p.m. a throstle, almost certainly the same bird, was singing in the same place. I have often wondered how, with so much time devoted to musical exercises, they

manage to find enough for the more important business of feeding themselves and their hungry broods.

A blackbird's song is, I think, always a love song, but mere exuberance of spirits will make a throstle sing. I have seen one sing snatches of his song whilst hunting for worms on the grass, as though he were too full of joyousness to contain himself, and a couple of them will sing at one another during intervals of quarrelling on the ground. There seems at all times more rivalry and contention between throstles throughout the whole season, and less of the spirit of *camaraderie* that one so often sees with blackbirds, at least when once they have settled the momentous question of pairing.

Within the bounds of general similarity much variety can be heard in the songs of throstles; no two seem to be exactly alike, and some birds are far better singers, have a much clearer, more musical note than others.

In 1907, and again in 1909, I noticed that throstles were in full song everywhere on July 15th, just as though it had been the middle of May.

A particular throstle will choose his favourite spot to sing from, and will keep to it more or less throughout the season. The point of a gable of the house is one such place (it is a Cheshire belief that a throstle brings you good luck when he chooses your

house to sing from), the top of the highest chimney has been another, and the weathercock on the outbuildings has been chosen year after year by a throstle as his own peculiar stand. This last is a favourite platform for the musical performances of other birds as well; a robin constantly uses it, and a swallow, and more than once I have seen a little wren there singing away with all his might, a might altogether out of proportion to his tiny body.

Whilst most throstles seem to like as high a perch as possible to sing from, I remember one that habitually poured forth the flood of his melody raised above the level of the ground by a clod of earth only.

One morning (in March, 1897) I heard a throstle uttering a peculiar shrill kind of cry, not a long-drawn-out note such as I have twice heard from a blackbird, but a succession rather of short notes. At first I couldn't make out what or where the noise was, but traced it after a time to the thrush, who continually uttered the cry as he was hunting for worms on the grass.

A standing marvel is the way in which a thrush can tell that there is a worm below the ground at a particular place. As he goes hopping about in a promiscuous sort of way, he suddenly stops with his head on one side looking and listening for a second, then he pounces on the exact spot and forthwith pulls

out a worm. Sometimes he makes a mistake, or, at all events, fails to make a catch, but not often. How does he do it? Does his quick sight detect some slight movement, or his quick ear some slight sound? Or has he any other sense of smell or sensation that helps him? Another marvel about the matter to anyone who has himself tried to pull a worm out of the ground is the ease with which a thrush manages so neatly and quickly to extract its victim entire.

I have found a throstle's nest in the side of a haystack, and was told of one in a pigstye and of another inside the porch of a house. In 1901 a throstle built in the roof of the lychgate of the churchyard close to this garden. Although the first nest was taken she made another in the same place and had very nearly hatched her eggs when again the thoughtless cruelty of boys made all her labour vain and abused the confidence she had so bravely shown in men. She used to sit on quite calmly, though only just above the heads of people as they went through the gate.

Generally speaking, throstles are so tame here that they hardly move out of your way, at most hopping a foot or two further off; and one will go on with his song undisturbed as I pass through an archway of pink thorn on which he is perched not two feet above. They are naturally, I think, more friendly in

their disposition towards human beings than blackbirds, which go clattering off whenever they see you near them.

In May, 1902, there must have been at least 20 throstles' nests in the garden itself. There were five, all in holly bushes, within 30 yards, by the side of one path, two in one tree, both of which had young ones in them at the same time. One bird had a nest just over the entrance to the house porch, through which we were in and out the whole day long, and we saw nothing of it until the young were hatched. Another chose an extraordinarily exposed situation, in a rhododendron just opposite the front door, from which we could see her quite plainly as she sat. The nest was actually not more than a foot or so from a little narrow path. We were constantly up and down this path and could hardly avoid brushing the leaves at the end of the very bough on which the nest was built, yet I never once saw her fly off. She used to keep her eye on us, but did not move even if we stood still only a few feet away and looked at her. This nest was under continual observation from the laying of the first egg to the flight of the last nestling, which remained for the best part of a day after the rest had flown.

On the other hand, in strange contrast to this confidence, there were three nests farther away from the house (one indeed absurdly close to a gate in constant use), from which

the birds flew off with a loud, startled cry if one waited for a moment near them. In one of these three nests the brood was reared, but of the other two one was deserted and one taken.

In 1899 a friend in the village assured me that there had been a throstle's nest with eight eggs in it close to her house. As only four of them, she said, hatched, perhaps the first hen was killed after she had laid her complement of eggs, and the cock brought home another mate to his ready-made nest.

I find a note that once I saw throstles join with starlings in their raid upon elder-berries, but I have seen nothing since to confirm this.

Until the winter of 1910-11 I very seldom found a throstle attempt to get the fat put out for tits; they generally content themselves with the crumbs that have fallen on the ground underneath. If the weather is at all severe they will come with sparrows to the fowls' food, but in a sharp, continuous frost they disappear almost entirely. (Blackbirds and some missel-thrushes remain.) This was very marked in February, 1902. Before the severe cold began throstles were plentiful; after it had continued for a few days not a single one was to be seen; but when the thaw set in, in less than a week they abounded again on every side.

Some redwings come here every winter, but they are less common than fieldfares and

they are not so noticeable. The points of difference between a redwing and a throstle, the rather smaller size, the red on the side, the slight variations in shades of colour and markings, may easily be passed over.

I have from my window seen a single redwing quite close to the house, in company with a single fieldfare, both busy with the holly berries, and in February, 1909, I saw all five of the commoner British thrushes collected together and between them quite covering a field which had lately been broken up by a subsoil cultivator.

A farmer tells me that the local name for redwing is "Kit," but I see in "The Birds of Cheshire" that "Kit" is given as one of the names for fieldfare.

We see fieldfares chiefly when they first arrive in October, and again in early spring, before they leave, but, of course, there are some with us most of the winter. The people here call them "Bluebacks," and it was remarked as a curious thing in the late cold spring of 1891 that on April 24th bluebacks were heard on one side of a field and a cuckoo on the other.

Blackbirds are, I think, nearly as plentiful as throstles, in spite of relentless persecution by strawberry-growing market gardeners. Sometimes, indeed, one is oneself compelled to own that we have a few more blackbirds than we really want. In hot, dry summers,



Old Yew Tree.

when the ground is hard, they do much damage to the apple crop. Not content with making short work with the "windfalls," they peck holes in some of the best fruit on the trees. I noticed this especially in 1899, and again in 1901 and 1911. In 1899 I saw four cock blackbirds amicably devouring a fallen apple together.

Though a blackbird's song is beautifully mellow, it is generally disconnected and fragmentary, but I remember hearing one once that seemed continuous, or at least much more so than usual.

One day at the end of March (in 1895) I saw perched on a twig of an oak tree and sitting quite close up against the trunk, a cock blackbird, which continually uttered a small, thin sharp note, almost like the squeaking of a slate pencil. He sat still in the same position for a considerable time, only opening his mouth at intervals of about a minute, or half a minute, to make this doleful noise. The same year, on June 15th, in exactly the same place, a cock blackbird went through exactly the same performance.

Every winter blackbirds have been amongst the most regular pensioners at the food-stand.

Several times during May in 1898, and again in 1899 and 1900 and since, I noticed a meeting of three, always, I think, three, cock blackbirds at one particular spot, always the same, near a holly tree on the

lawn, which happens to be just opposite my window, where I could watch them easily and unobserved. They seemed to go through a regular set performance, like a game or a dance. They did not fight, though they sometimes sparred a little, but ran round and round and in and out, following and passing one another. It reminded me of a friendly gathering of husbands for amusement, while their wives were busy with household cares at home!

I was much interested one day (March, 1902) in the proceedings of two pair of blackbirds. One very elegant cock, slender and graceful, with intensely black coat and very bright orange bill, was seeking to impress the hen of his choice by a series of little runs on every side of her, with his tail spread out and sweeping the grass, his body in the shape of a bow, his beak almost touching the ground; meanwhile, the object of all this attention seemed to consider it a mere matter of course and to be calmly indifferent. Presently another cock, not nearly so spruce, came on the scene accompanied by another mate. The gallant dandy evidently had no stomach for fighting, and promptly disappeared behind a holly bush when the newcomer threatened to assault him. His partner, however, was made of sterner stuff, and without more ado attacked and drove away both the intruders.

I have never heard that there is any real difference in size, but hen blackbirds appear bigger than cocks, just as young gulls in immature plumage seem larger than old ones. I suppose the different colour has something to do with it, and perhaps the cock's feathers are more closely set than the hen's.

My wife told me that she had seen one evening in September (1907) 16 blackbirds on the tennis ground together. This seems perhaps rather a large order, as they say, but in the following September I counted nine myself, to the best of my belief, all of them cocks.

IV.

CHATS, ROBINS AND WARBLERS.

In spring, and again in autumn, wheatears pass through, and may be seen about for several days at a time. In April and May, 1908, a pair stayed so long in some rough ground near the bank of the Ship Canal that I thought they might be going to take up their quarters there for the season, but by May 31st they had disappeared.

We always have a fair number of whinchats in the meadows, and hardly a year passes without seeing them on the grass in the garden itself. One very wet summer, when in the low-lying lands the haycocks were standing for days surrounded by water, I remember being struck by the number of whinchats to be seen perching and chatting first on one haycock and then on another.

Though whinchats are so comparatively common, and their usual note, exactly like the knocking of two pebbles together, is constantly heard, their pretty little song, a cadence of a few notes repeated over and over again, I do not remember to have noticed here.

Only once have I seen a stonechat in the neighbourhood of this garden. This was in October, 1890. On the opposite side of the river the land had been raised by material

excavated in the making of the Ship Canal, and was at that time wild and covered with a strong growth of all kinds of weeds. It was on a wire fence that ran along this bank that I saw the bright little bird. And there, with a curious pendulum-like movement of its tail, it continued to sit for a considerable time, giving me ample opportunity to study it leisurely through a field-glass.

Though redstarts are not uncommon in Dunham Park a few miles away, only once have I seen one in the garden, in August, 1894. It stayed for several days, and was never far away from the place where I first saw it. I noticed that other birds who are at home here, wagtails especially, seemed to look upon it as an interloper and resented its intrusion.

One of the first things that I remember about the natural history of Warburton is a brood of four white—or more strictly speaking, cream-coloured—robins that were hatched in a neighbouring garden in 1872. They were jealously watched over by the owner of the garden, and I often saw two of them until the autumn. Then they must either have been taken (and many people were after them) or have moulted to the ordinary robin colours, for we saw them no more.

Robins are plentiful in the garden and in the neighbourhood generally. They show

much courage and skill in getting at the fat on the food-stand, no matter how greatly the difficulties of doing so may have been multiplied.

It has been said that robins have more power than most birds to see through the window into a room, and I certainly have observed that though as a rule neither robins nor tits take much notice if I am standing close by the window, yet sometimes a robin appears that will spy me out as I sit by the fire quite far away and be off in an instant. I have sometimes wondered if such wild robins might be immigrants from the Continent, where by all accounts they are less tame than in England.

Robins are pugnacious, and their duels are not unfrequently to the death. I have seen a robin pursue a sparrow and even fly straight at a great tit and knock it off the food-stand, but I have noticed that generally a robin makes way for a sparrow, and seldom stands up to a tit of any kind, not even a marsh or a coal-tit, birds hardly half its size. I remember one, however, in the winter of 1900-01 who indiscriminately attacked all tits on the food-stand. He was very friendly with me, and used to watch as I filled the receptacles, when he would come close up and wait for a bit to be thrown to him, and often as he saw me coming he would sit on a corner of the porch roof and warble a little song of wel-

come. Another year (1901-02) two, sometimes three, and occasionally four, robins would be there together almost under my feet and ready to pick up anything I threw them. Very unlike most robins, they seemed on perfectly good terms with one another.

In November, 1905, a robin used to come into the house through the open windows and make himself quite at home; he would sometimes sit and sing on the bannisters in the hall.

I saw a very tame robin at Budworth in 1904. I was in the garden with the lady to whom it belonged when the bird flew on to her hand, and he used to come into the drawing-room without any hesitation and take his place at afternoon tea.

In 1910 a pair of robins built in the pulpit desk of Oughtrington Church near here, and hatched out four young ones. A friend who went to service one Sunday evening in June saw a robin flying about and singing until the sermon began, but then it took up a position on the back of a seat near the pulpit and looked up at the preacher, quite silent and apparently listening.

One of the prettiest little episodes of bird-life is the delicate attention bestowed by a robin on the chosen partner of his joys and cares that I have several times witnessed during April and May. Whilst she remained watching and waiting on the ground below,

he would fly up to the food-stand and secure a morsel which, with a tender grace, he presented to her. The gallant devotion so plainly expressed by the one and the caressing, coquetting airs of the other were most amusing. I have seen, too, about the same time of the year, one robin feeding another with flies picked from the grass and the lower boughs of a deadara tree. The robin that was being fed did not attempt to pick up anything for itself, but sat there on the grass quivering its wings and opening its mouth like a nestling.

Robins often catch flies in the air, flying up from the ground after them, and I have seen one dart off from the branch of a tree, capture a passing fly and return again to the same perch, for all the world like a flycatcher.

One showery day in spring I saw a robin on the food-stand washing itself in the rain, spreading out its wings, shaking its feathers, bobbing and ducking about as though it had been in a bath, and I have noticed one washing in wet leaves and drinking from the tips of leaves.

Greater whitethroats are as common in this garden and neighbourhood as in most places. One that had its nest by the old river bank used to come and scold whenever I went near, and never ceased until I left. Such a proceeding looks like a case of instinct play-

ing a bird false, and serving only to draw attention to what it is wished to conceal.

Lesser whitethroats come to us every year, and may be said to be fairly common in the village. They are always shy and restless and more frequently heard than seen.

There was a lesser whitethroat's nest one year (1898) in a holly bush, in which all five young ones used to be, whenever I looked at them, apparently sleepy, with their heads shoved up over the side of the nest. They never opened their mouths when we went near, and yet often as I watched I never saw the parents feed them.

Blackcaps are not uncommon within easy reach of us, but only twice have I seen one actually in the garden. The first time the unusual sound of its wonderfully clear note attracted my attention was in July, 1899. The bird stayed here then for several days, singing occasionally all the while. The second time a blackcap came was in May, 1903. It was in the garden for about ten days, and I hoped it might be going to nest here, especially as one day I thought I saw a pair.

I noticed a difference in habits between the July bird and the one that came in May. In July, when the joys and cares of family life were over, there was more deliberation and less shyness. I was able to watch the bird easily and for a long time together. In May

he was restless and very wary, and it was with difficulty I could get a glimpse of him. He was always on the move, hunting about in the tops of the trees, and, I thought, singing in competition with the willow-wrens.

The blackcap is often placed next to the nightingale as a songster, but there is a very wide interval between them. The most inattentive listener can hardly fail to notice a nightingale's song, but people who are not accustomed to distinguish the different notes of birds are often quite unaware of the presence of a singing blackcap, as the tone of his song mingles with the general chorus.

Golden-crested wrens are not uncommon in winter, but I have never found a nest here. I notice them most often in October and November, as they are hunting in and out the yews and Scotch firs, sometimes a large party, sometimes only a single pair.

One June day I was sitting in a cousin's garden in Wales, when out of an arbor-vitæ close by appeared a dilapidated-looking gold-crest, which set to work violently and persistently to abuse me. Herein, I think, like the whitethroat mentioned before, it displayed either a perversion of instinct or a want of sense. If it had only kept quiet I should not have thought of a nest, but it told me so plainly that it had one in that very tree that I looked as a matter of course

and found it, packed with fully-fledged young ones.

Chiffchaffs never stay with us, though they are to be found only a few miles away, but I sometimes see them and hear their well-known note in spring and autumn for a day or two.

Willow-warblers abound ("Peggy white-throat" is the Cheshire name), and it is a delight to catch for the first time each spring their lovely little song, of which, unlike the wearisome iteration of the chiffchaff, one never tires. The American naturalist, John Burroughs, describes the willow-warbler's strain as the most melodious he heard in England, and the only one exhibiting the best qualities of American songsters. He adds: "It is too fine for the ordinary English ear!" As if on a visit of a few weeks to a strange country he could possibly know what most English people either thought or liked!

Willow-wrens as a rule keep pretty high up in the trees, but one sometimes sees them on the grass picking up flies or flying up after them in the air. Later on in summer they hunt for insects in the kitchen garden, and are often to be seen running up and down the pea-sticks.

Though silent in July, they sing again after the middle of August. I have known a willow-wren's nest here in the middle of a roughish piece of ground that was continually

walked over, about as unprotected position as you could wish, and yet the young were successfully reared. I have seen a willow-wren attack and drive away a perfectly inoffensive marsh-tit that happened to alight near it on the grass.

The wood-wren, with its "sibilous shivering note," I have heard at Budworth, a few miles away, but never in this garden or immediate neighbourhood.

The garden-warbler, too, is quite a stranger, and I have never recognised it in these parts at all. In May, 1900, I saw and heard one for several days in a garden in North Wales, where it is generally supposed to be unknown.

Sedge-warblers sing incessantly when first they come, but after they have been here for a little while are much less frequently heard. They usually are hidden in the depths of a bush when singing, but I have seen one pouring out its impetuous song mounted on a telephone wire in the open, 20 feet from the ground, and another that sang as it was flying. For several years a sedge-warbler has begun to sing again here in July, not having been heard for some weeks previously. In 1907, for example, from July 24th to August 2nd, he could, without much exaggeration, be said to have sung all day and all night. I heard him at seven in the morning when I got up and at twelve at night when I went to bed, and I have a note of

much the same thing in 1910, about the same date. The bird that year chose as his special platform the lower branches of a sycamore, and would every now and then fly off into the air singing all the while at the very top of his voice, and then return to the tree to sing again.

Hedgesparrows are common enough all the year round, and are great favourites of mine. They are elegant birds in their modest way, they are unobtrusive and useful, and their song, if not brilliant, is pleasant, and like that of the wren and the robin, it helps to cheer the dull winter months when the more famous warblers are away enjoying the warmth of some sunny southern country.

There is no month in the year in which at one time or another I have not heard the hedge-sparrow's song, but March is the time of all others to hear it, then it seems impossible to get away from it at any hour of the day.

Hedgesparrows creep about in a mouse-like fashion peculiar to themselves, with a series of little running jumps, and the continual shuffling or flipping movement of their wings is very noticeable.

They will take their share of the fowls' food with other birds, and will come all round the food-stand and pick up the minutest morsels of something on the ground, but (except in the case of a bird in the cold

weather of January, 1902), I have never seen one make an attempt to get at the food on the stand itself.

Sometimes on first turning out on a dark winter's morning, between seven and eight, hedgesparrows will be squatting on the path, and will almost let you walk over them before they get out of your way.

V.

TITS AND WRENS.

Only once, in August, 1904, have I caught sight of a party of long-tailed tits in the garden, but a friend who lived hardly a mile away used to tell me that little parties of eight or nine might be seen flying through his orchard nearly every winter. I think he said they called them "churns," or something that sounded like that.

Great-tits are common the whole year round, and very handsome they look when their suits of velvet-black and yellow are at their best. They are constant visitors to the food-stand, and are not baffled by any contrivance for excluding sparrows, but they are not so plucky or so clever at it as tomtits. They are hectoring, full of bustle and importance, and make themselves generally disagreeable to other birds, but I have seldom, if ever, seen one great-tit attack another. Sometimes one sees a pair of the quietest possible character; on the most affectionate terms with one another they will come to the stand together and appear perfectly oblivious of the presence there of any other birds.

It is not at all uncommon to see a great-tit with a crooked tail, slightly sickle-shaped. It cannot always be the same bird, for it is 16 years since I first noticed a bird with such a

tail, and nearly every year still (1912) I see one.

One may often hear a tapping sound in trees and shrubs that is made by a great-tit, and I have watched the bird after considerable tapping draw out a grub of some sort from under the bark. I noticed on another occasion that a tit in making this tapping noise was beating something (through the glass it looked like a beetle) which it held in its beak against a bough of the tree.

Like tom-tits, great-tits will fly off with grains of Indian corn, and, like coal-tits, they are fond of sunflower seeds. (In spite of what Gilbert White says, I have never seen tom-tits here touch sunflower seeds.)

A great-tit has a note very much like the "pink, pink" of a chaffinch, which he occasionally uses.

Though great-tits are, no doubt, handsome birds, they are not nearly so interesting in my opinion as either of the other three common kinds of tit. None of them, indeed, can really compare in interest with that audacious little villain, the tom-tit, or blue-tit, or, as he is called here, blue-cap. He is so full of spirits, so resolute and domineering, I delight to hear his cheery little song, if it is to be called a song.

Tom-tits in abundance come to the food-stand, which in the first instance was specially intended for their benefit. They will come



Sundial in Old Church Yard.

more or less the whole year through if the food is left there, but, of course, many more in winter than in summer, and most of all in February and the beginning of March, when I have counted twelve on the stand at once, but the numbers fall off very quickly towards the middle of March.

I have noticed every year that at certain times of the day, especially from about 12.30 to 1.30, there is a marked increase in numbers. In winter at least no five minutes passes without one or more birds appearing, but at mid-day, and again to a lesser extent just before it begins to get dark, they seem literally to swarm.

I have found that all tits, as well as sparrows and robins, prefer a mixture of bread and fat to fat alone. During February and March, 1897, I weighed all the bread and fat consumed on the food-stand and found that it was as nearly as possible eleven pounds. Lately I have added cocoanuts to the bill of fare; they are appreciated by the tits, but blackbirds, robins and thrushes prefer the bread and fat mixture, or rather they do not seem to care at all for the cocoanuts.

It is curious to see how quickly birds discover that food has been put out on the stand. One year, after the receptacles had been empty for weeks in the summer, I put in some fat, and in less than five minutes a

tom-tit was there. Another time I made a longish block of wood, bored nearly through with holes, which were filled with fat smoothed off level with the surface. This block was hung with the holes downwards, so that from above it could look like a bit of wood only. It was hung up at 10.30 a.m., and at 11.30 a tom-tit had found it out, and was eating away at the fat as he clung to the block back downwards.

Tom-tits, unlike great-tits, bully one another most unmercifully. They can recognize each other at a great distance. A tom-tit on the food-stand seems to know at once whether another arriving on the nearest tree, some ten yards or more away, is his superior or inferior in prowess. Sometimes he will ruffle up his feathers as if in resentment at threatened intrusion, at other times he is prepared to make way at once. As is the case with a herd of cows on a farm, the relative standing between them seems to be an acknowledged matter and is seldom contested. To us a couple of tom-tits appear as like as two peas if we have them actually in the hand, and though it is easy to understand that they can themselves distinguish differences at close quarters, and may have some other sense than we have to help them, yet it is a marvellous thing that they can do so without doubt or hesitation at a distance of yards.

The whole question as to how birds recognize one another is very interesting. We know that a shepherd can tell one sheep of his flock from another as easily as we can distinguish between two men, but in the feathered face of a bird there seems to us so little room for difference of expression, and, generally speaking, if we take feather by feather the description of one bird will apply equally well to any other of the same species.

Tom-tits as a rule make way for a great-tit, but I have seen them fight occasionally, and the tom-tit does not always come off second-best. They are complete masters of both marsh and coal-tits, neither of which dream of resisting them. They pay scarcely any heed one way or another to sparrows or robins.

Both tom-tits and great-tits in the flush of their spring-time ardour pay to their chosen helpmates the same delicate attentions as do robins. It is always a pretty picture to see them present their offerings of food, but with tits it seems a rather more business-like matter and to lack something of the tender sentiment so plainly shown by the robins.

Though not nearly so plentiful as tom-tits, both marsh and coal-tits are with us more or less all the year round. Of the two, perhaps the marsh-tit is the more regular, sometimes a pair seem to make the garden their headquarters and to be always about, but several

years may pass without our seeing one coal-tit; then they will become almost as common as tom-tits for a year or so, when again the number will dwindle down to, it may be, a single pair.

Some years ago all four kinds of tit used to come together to the food-stand, but (with the exception of a pair of coal-tits in the winter of 1910-11) since 1899 tom-tits and great-tits have had it all to themselves, neither marsh nor coal-tits have been there, though both are still frequent visitors to the garden at all times of the year.

In June broods of young tits appear flying from tree to tree in little parties. The old birds tirelessly hunt for food, whilst the greeny-yellow little ones sit expecting and cheeping among the boughs.

In comparing the marsh and coal-tits together one might imagine that they each originally had the same amount of black allowed them for the head, but while the marsh-tit preferred to have all his in one patch at the back, the coal-tit would have a bit cut out to make a bib for his chin! Of the two the marsh-tit is my favourite. I like the delicate tints of its more sober colouring better than the more contrasted yet more commonplace colours of the coal-tit.

There seems something savouring of meanness about coal-tits; they are cautious and artful and carry away their food pre-

sumably to store, there is not time to have swallowed it before they are back again at the stand.

A pair of coal-tits that were here one winter seemed quite demoralised by the food-stand, and to have altogether given up hunting for their natural food.

Both kinds are perfectly amicable together, but a marsh will make way for a coal-tit. The marsh-tit seems to excite special animosity in tom-tits, whilst the coal-tit watches his opportunity, and, nipping in just at the right moment, escapes much persecution. Of the two the coal-tit has a more musical voice and a greater variety of notes, but once (in 1899) when watching a party of marsh-tits, I heard, besides the usual harsh note, a kind of continuous warble every now and then, which I could attribute to no other bird, though I could not actually see a marsh-tit uttering it.

The delightful little wrens are always with us, and the loud, clear ringing notes of their sweet song may be heard almost throughout the year. In July, when most birds are silent, the wren does his best to make up for it, he seems to take a pleasure in having the field to himself, and his song may be heard, and often his alone every day until the middle of August. By that time some of the robins, having recovered from their moult, begin to tune up, and the wren leaves it to

them to keep the ball going whilst he retires from the scene to complete his own change of feather. Apparently with such a tiny body to cover that is not a long business, for his bright little voice may be heard again early in September. I always myself feel inclined to say "thank you" at the conclusion of a wren's musical effort, and have been surprised to find that there are people, it may be many people, who do not hear his song at all of themselves, and when their attention is specially drawn think it "only a bird squeaking!"

Wrens never seem to be tame in the same way that robins are, nor do they ever attempt to get at the food on the stand, or to share in the fowls' meals, but they often come close to the windows, creeping up and down the frames, in quest of spiders and other small game.

A sight was reported to me the other day that I would have given a good deal to have seen with my own eyes. When for two days in January (1912) the ground was thickly covered with snow, I put a plate of scraps for the birds in the open porch. In the evening of the second day of snow, when the maid went to light the porch lamp, she saw this plate, as she described it, full of wrens (little birds with their tails turned up over their backs, she called them); there must have been, she thought, certainly not less than

fifteen of them. When they saw her they flew off in a flock to the creeper outside, just where for two or three years there has been a wren's nest. Perhaps this little company was made up of the family that owned that nest as their home. It was in 1909 that a wren first built there among the stems of the Virginian creeper close to the front door. The body of the nest was quite hidden between the creeper and the wall, the little entrance-hole alone being visible. We constantly saw the bird going in and out, taking a turn to stretch his wings or bringing home provisions for his household, and often he would sit close by and give vent to his feelings in a joyous burst of song. He appears to have been pleased with the success of his first venture on this site, for he has used the very same nest for the last two years.

A wren has the same directness of flight as a kingfisher or a dipper; it has none of the up and down course of most small birds, but it follows a bee-line to its destination, with rapidly-beating wings, but making comparatively slow progress. I was much struck by this, as one day I watched a wren fly from a low bush to a height of 40 or 50 feet up a poplar, it seemed to take quite an age to get there.

VI.

WAGTAILS, FLYCATCHERS, SWALLOWS AND
OTHER INSECT-EATERS.

Pied wagtails never entirely desert us, though, of course, there are many more, and they are much more in evidence, in summer than in winter. It is a continual pleasure to watch them, to see the speed with which they run in pursuit of a fly, the deftness of the capture, and the satisfaction so plainly displayed at the feat, by the eloquent balancing of the long tail. One day in August (1899) I watched a wagtail through a glass, and distinctly saw him capture and devour four "daddy-long legs" in succession. Besides running after them on the ground, they will often fly up at insects in the air.

Pied wagtails are no respecters of persons as far as other birds are concerned; I have seen a single wagtail at one time pursuing a peewit, at another a sandpiper, and their encounters with swallows on the grass are most amusing to watch. When the swallows are flying low the wagtails will deliberately fly at them and even for a little way after them.

A family of pied wagtails usually take possession of the lawn opposite one of our windows, and we can observe the process of education in the art of catching flies, from the

stage in which the young are content to be fed entirely by their parents through that in which they supplement the supply by their own efforts, until finally little difference in skill is to be noticed between old birds and the young. This family appear to resent the intrusion of other birds on their domain (as shown in their behaviour towards swallows), and I have seen them persistently drive away young yellow wagtails who presumed to trespass on their hunting ground.

Yellow wagtails are not so often seen in the garden, though they are plentiful enough in the neighbourhood. They are lively and attractive and their bright colour contrasts strongly with the freshly ploughed earth so that their arrival is always noticed by the farmers and seems to interest them more than the coming of any other migrant except the cuckoo.

Meadow pipits are common in the fields around, but I cannot remember ever to have seen one actually in the garden. On a rough bit of ground near the Ship Canal bridge they are always to be found, and I have watched one there for twenty minutes or more at a time as he soared up to a considerable height, singing all the time, and then came down again to the ground with wings and tail spread out, after the manner of a tree-pipit, with a little musical twitter just as he landed. It kept repeating this performance

over and over again all the time I was there.

For some years a tree-pipit used to take up his abode with us every summer and give us the benefit of his energetic song. I was very much amused once to watch him on some iron hurdles at the end of the garden. He was so much in earnest and so full of energy; he would sing a little bit, then run along the top rail a little way, then sing again, and so on until he had gone nearly the whole length of the railings. This entertainment he went through day after day for a fortnight or more at the end of June and the beginning of July.

Spotted flycatchers have not been as common with us lately as they were at one time, when they always made their home here during their summer visit to this country, and were constantly in evidence. We have not had a nest for several years, and last year (1911) I did not see a single flycatcher in the garden, but this year, I am glad to say, they have come back again and there has been a nest in the ivy on the house wall. It was placed so low down that we could easily look into it, but never once did I surprise the old bird; she seemed to hear one's footsteps at a distance, and long before one reached the nest she was off. The young were hatched on June 29th, but their eyes did not open until July 6th. Whilst they were blind and as they grew bigger the nest seemed much too

small for them, and often one fancied two of them must inevitably have been smothered, as they were quite hidden under the other three. Even after they could see there was some confusion during the heat of the day; but it was one of the prettiest sights imaginable when they were tucked in for the night; all five heads with their sharp little beaks and bright black eyes were arranged in perfect order, all looking together in the same direction out of the nest. People in the village call these birds by the name of "old man," and it seems expressive, somehow peculiarly appropriate to their greyish colouring and quiet unobtrusive manners.

For five years running a pair of flycatchers built in a fork of a thick ivy-stem on the old church tower. They chose a most exposed place by the side of a walk trodden by dozens of visitors to the church nearly every day of the summer. The first time we noticed it (in 1894) the nest was so low and so exposed that nothing could save it. In 1895, when it was placed higher up and better concealed, the young were successfully reared. In 1896 they chose a position actually not more than three feet from the ground, and yet, marvellous to relate, owing to watchful care on the part of human friends, and the continual replacing of a screen of ivy leaves, they scored another success. In 1897, though the site was higher up and apparently much safer,

the young birds were taken, but in 1898 they were again able to escape the attentions of cats and boys and bring off their brood without mishap; in 1899 they wisely abandoned the dangerous situation altogether.

I was once watching a flycatcher perched on the food-stand opposite and close to my open window, when I noticed that besides a constantly-repeated weak single note, it had every now and then a cadence of two and again of three notes, and sometimes a very faint kind of inward warble.

The iron boundary hurdles on the south side of the garden are a favourite stand for flycatchers, and I have seen them busily occupied there in catching flies, which they carried to their young ones in the trees near by, whilst every now and then the prettily-marked youngsters would themselves come down to the top rail and sit there to be fed. Croquet hoops on the grass near these hurdles seem to have a great attraction for them. Two, sometimes three, would be there at the same time. After each pursuit of a passing fly they would return now to the same hoop, now to another, and sometimes they seemed to go the round of all the hoops in turn. Every day throughout the summer they would be there, and in the white line under each hoop was left indisputable evidence of their regular occupation.

Towards the end of July, 1902, we were

much interested in a pair of flycatchers with their little family of three. One of the old birds would spend its time catching flies for the young ones, whilst the other rested, sitting quite unconcerned by itself on the rails. When the working parent brought a fly to one of the family the other two would hurry up, and there was constantly a small crowd of four gesticulating little birds in one part or other of the lawn. Between the intervals of being fed the young birds learnt to forage for themselves, not, I noticed, flying off the ground after insects, but running after them on the grass. These five birds stayed with us until September 9th. They often flew down from the trees to catch flies on the grass, and would hover in front of shrubs and tall plants whilst they picked off the flies near them.

When flycatchers have been on the croquet hoops and swallows were flying low, they had not seldom to get pretty sharply out of the way to avoid a collision, as the swallows appeared purposely to fly at them.

In 1908 we were fortunate enough to see a bird here that is very seldom found in Cheshire, namely, a pied flycatcher. It was in the evening of August 25th that we saw it. The strange little bird came quite close up to the French window of the room in which we were sitting, and we noticed plainly the white patch on his wing. It did not seem

at all shy, and I watched it about the house for an hour or so.

It is said in "The Fauna of Cheshire" that while birds are sometimes seen during the spring migration, there is no other record of a pied flycatcher in Cheshire on the return journey in autumn.

Of swallows there is no lack. Nearly every year there are one or two nests in the outbuildings, and in 1900 a pair began to build against the wall of the house-porch just over the front door. The wall was perfectly flat, and they began to fasten mud against it as a house-martin would have done. To save possible untoward consequences to the hats of visitors I rigged up a shelf over the door; this, perhaps, frightened them, at any rate, they did not go on with their work.

In 1908 a pair set their minds on building in the old church, and build they did in spite of all we could do in the way of keeping doors and windows shut (they must have found their way through some broken quarry of a window). However, when we saw that we were beaten we made the best of it, and really there was very little mess, and it was pleasant to hear them warbling in the roof. When the young birds were hatched in July the old ones were more wary than ever. If they saw anyone in the church, instead of going on to the nest, they would turn back and fly away with their mouthful of dainties.

However, by hiding, I managed to see the nestlings fed, and noticed that though they were very vociferous when they guessed there was an immediate prospect of their hunger being satisfied, a warning note from the old bird seemed to silence them at once.

For a good many years a pair of swallows have nested in the porch of the new church, and in 1910 an old trimmed straw hat that hung on a nail in an outbuilding at the church-house was chosen by another pair as a suitable foundation for their nest, and in this rather strangely-placed nursery they brought up a young family.

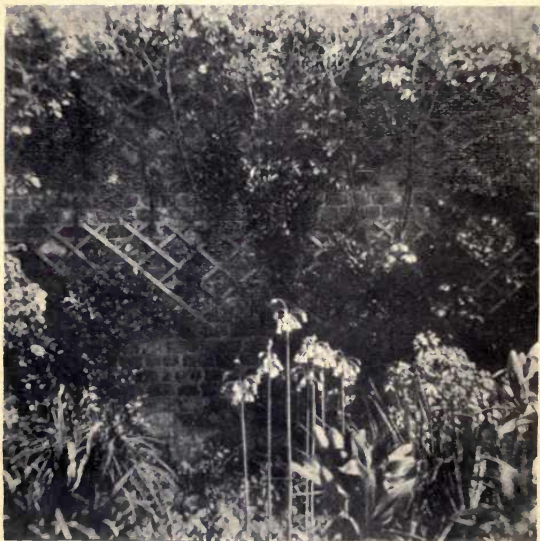
There is something very charming in the swallow's warbling song, beyond its association with warm and beautiful weather; and when in autumn they are congregating by thousands, to hear them all chanting together as they fill the air, and, sailing round and round in widening and interlacing circles, mount higher and higher until the highest are almost out of sight, is to my mind wonderfully grand and impressive.

Sometimes the swallows melt away without any noticeable gatherings, while in other years they assemble in such flocks about the end of September that in certain favourite hunting grounds the sky is almost darkened by them, and to watch the intricate maze of perpetual motion is enough to make one giddy, while as at intervals they sit resting,

they seem to stretch away for miles in long lines on the telegraph wires.

Swallows and wagtails apparently grudge one another (and flycatchers) a share in their insect sporting rights, if their mutual spitefulness has any meaning. This common taste for the same kind of food often brings the three into close quarters, and it is curious to notice the different methods they use to compass the same end; the swallow ceaselessly rushing at full speed through the air, the wagtail trusting to his nimbleness of foot, and the flycatcher making a series of little excursions upwards after his prey. I have seen swallows walking about on the grass and picking up flies, and when their young ones are resting on the ground they will often bring them food there, alighting by the side first of one and then of another.

Ten years ago it was only on two or three houses in the village that house-martins built, and they were seldom seen except in the immediate neighbourhood of these, but now (1911) they have become comparatively abundant everywhere. The wooden haysheds recently put up at many of the farms seem to have attracted them in the first instance, but when once they were led to look more closely into the matter they evidently found that there were many more eligible building sites in Warburton than they had had any idea of before. They have never



A Corner in the Garden with *Allium Dioscorides*.

yet made their real home with us, but during the latter part of the summer they come in crowds to the garden, and there are among them many only just able to fly, who spend most of their time on the roof of the house, waiting to be fed.

Two house-martins fell down a bedroom chimney here, and when I opened the window to let them out, whilst one took advantage of it at once the other kept flying round and round quite close up to the ceiling and resting on a bell-wire that ran across. It was a long time, more than half an hour, before I could persuade him that he was looking in the wrong place for a way of escape.

At one time after the Ship Canal had been begun and traffic had ceased on the river, a large colony of sand-martins established themselves under the disused towing-path almost opposite, and naturally they were then plentiful enough. Now, as far as we are concerned, the river with all its belongings is a thing of the past, and it is only occasionally that we see the little brown birds hawking for flies in the garden.

I was surprised not long ago to find in a field-sandpit, a mile away from any other sand-martins' nests that I knew of, a solitary nest in a hole within easy reach of my hand. The young must have been hatched, for I watched the birds go in with food.

Sand-martins have a peculiar interest as

being perhaps the most universally distributed of all small birds. One likes to think that nearly everywhere one went, in Asia, Africa or America, the very same little brown swallows might be seen ceaselessly flitting about, bringing back to mind the green fields and cloudy skies of home in England.

Only once have I seen that other cosmopolitan, the tree-creeper, in the garden. One morning in May, 1895, I heard a strange, small, rather shrill song and found that it came from a little brown tree-creeper on an oak just opposite my window. I watched it for some time through field glasses as it climbed about, prying into every crack of the bark and singing as it worked.

VII.

SPARROWS AND OTHER FINCHES.

Although I have never myself seen a goldfinch in the garden, they have been seen here, and on the rough ground near the Ship Canal they are not uncommon, indeed, I have heard of several shillings a week being made by birds that have been caught there in spite of County Council orders. They are usually known here as "red linnets," but another Cheshire name for them is "nickers."

Greenfinches (green linnets in Cheshire) abound; in early spring they are more than usually conspicuous, as in their brightest feather they pursue one another in and out among the hollies and dark yew hedges. Though then less evident to the eye, throughout the summer they let us know by their unmistakable and wearisome notes that they are with us still.

As early as April 29th, in 1890, I watched a greenfinch on a thorn opposite my window feeding what appeared to be a fully-fledged young one. It was pumping up the food from its craw, in the same way that a pigeon does. The end of April is so unusually early for a greenfinch family to have flown, that perhaps it was only another instance of delicate marital attention, such as I have noticed in the case of robins and tits.

In February, 1893, a hen hawfinch was shown me. It had just been shot in the village, and in 1894 I heard of a nest in the gardens at Lymm Hall, rather more than two miles away.

My wife told me one morning in October, 1910, that she had seen on a tree near her window a thick-set bird with a big head and short tail and neck, whose colour she described as some shades of brown. Two or three little birds appeared to be mobbing it, and it kept pecking at them like a parrot. She only saw it for a minute or two, before it flew away round the corner of the house. It altogether sounds as though it might have been a hawfinch.

House-sparrows abound here, and are interesting and amusing to the unprejudiced looker-on who doesn't suffer from their depredations. There is no denying that sparrows are vulgar, and bold and pushing, or that they are tiresomely persevering in the mischief that they do. They are coarsely built and have no song, while their monotonous chirp is distracting, but they have that which for the race of life stands them in more stead than either beauty or musical talent; they have courage and intelligence, a wonderful power of adapting themselves to circumstances and a sound healthy constitution, with a digestion that an ostrich might envy.

The food-stand has shown me what sparrows are and what they can do. When I set it up I had no wish to feed sparrows, and could not bear to see them devouring all before them in the greedy, systematic way that they have. So I set my wits to work to see if I could not contrive something by which they might be baffled without depriving the tits of their food. It proved more than I could do to prevent any of the sparrows getting any of the food, but I was able to make it more difficult for them, so difficult that only a few could manage it. They differ very much individually: some are far bolder and more enterprising than others, but I have found that some sparrows can do almost anything that a tit can do in the way of acrobatic performances, though not, of course, with the same easy grace. I tried many devices. I had seen somewhere that if food were suspended from a pliable twig only tits would venture to attack it. It didn't take long to prove the fallacy of this idea. The swinging of the net made not the slightest difference to the sparrows; they alighted on it just as readily as if it had been lying on the ground. Then I tried hanging the net at one end of a stick and a movable weight at the other. The stick acted as a balance, and the net went down directly a bird settled on it. This instability frightened the sparrows for a long time, but in the end

they got quite used to it. It was the same with many other contrivances that I tried, they answered their purpose for a time, it may be altogether as far as most went, but in every case sooner or later some sparrows learnt to overcome every difficulty, and it struck me that each successive year they seemed to do so more easily, as though they turned the experience of one year to good account in the next.

In 1899 I made an apparatus like a wind-mill, with four arms, and food in a kind of little box at the end of each. The arms, of course, went down directly a bird touched them. This for a long time was effectual, and I had begun to flatter myself that I had solved the problem, but during a hard frost some one or two sparrows overcame their fears and managed to get the fat, and when once they saw it might be done with safety many others learnt the trick. I then complicated the idea into a wheel, with eight arms, and food only at the extreme point of each. This answered so far that no sparrow seemed able to get at the fat from the revolving arm itself as they hung on to it (an easy feat for the tits), but they used to hover opposite the ends of the arms and pick out the food. (Robins did this also.) Independently of its effect in discouraging the sparrows, the wheel afforded much amusement by the antics it imposed upon the tits as they went round and up and down on the arms.

One plan I tried depended for its action on the difference of weight between a sparrow and a tit. It was the opposite of the arrangement by which sparrows are prevented from appropriating the food put out for pheasants, where the pheasant opens the corn-box by his weight on the perch outside. I tried so to arrange the balance that the heavier sparrow was cut off from the hole which contained the food, whilst for the tit it remained open. The practical drawback to this plan was the nicety of adjustment required, for though a sparrow is more than twice the weight of a tom-tit, the difference between the two weights is little more than a quarter of an ounce.

One of the most successful contrivances, after all, is one of the simplest. Take a tin canister (one that I used was three inches long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ in diameter), hang it open end downwards by a string brought through a hole in the other end, to this string fasten inside the tin a bit of wood about the thickness of a large pencil, and let it hang like the clapper in a bell, projecting a quarter of an inch below the bottom rim of the tin. Plaster all round the inside of the tin with fat, leaving the wooden tongue in the middle free for the birds to cling to. In this way both great-tits and tom-tits can feed themselves without difficulty, but only one sparrow in twenty can manage with much ado to hold

on and to eat at the same time. (To see a sparrow with his less-practised feet clinging to the edge of the tin, back downwards, just like a tit and helping himself to its contents is a good example of the energetic enterprise and the adaptability of his nature.) Robins do sometimes hold on to the tin in the same way, but generally they get quite as much as they want by flying up and pecking at the fat. They seem able to aim very accurately, and when the tin is nearly empty can make sure of the smallest fragments. Sparrows also attack the food in the same way by flying up at it, but they seem to find it more awkward, owing, perhaps, to the small space between the sides of the tin and the wood in the middle, which barely gives room for their larger heads and clumsier beaks.

Another successful plan was to suspend the fat within a roll of inch-mesh wire netting. To begin with I put this on the food-stand, at some little distance from my window, and though at first only tits and robins would venture down within the roll of wire, after a time the sparrows followed suit, and, of course, there was nothing to prevent them getting as much as they liked but their own caution. I might have stopped them by covering the top with netting, but then the great-tits and robins would have been excluded as well as the sparrows, and even tomtits could only get through the meshes

with difficulty. However, I moved the roll quite close up to the glass of the window, leaving the top still uncovered (and the bottom closed) as before. Tom-tits came to it in its new position almost as readily as when on the food-stand. Great-tits came but were always rather uneasy about it, but not one sparrow ventured to clamber down inside the roll, although it was there for more than a year and we had some very hard frosts. They would continually try to get at the food from underneath and from the side, but could not make up their minds to go inside the roll itself, although it was quite open and they had learnt to go in without scruple when it was on the food-stand, before it was put close to the window. The most fearless of any birds with regard to this wire roll were two robins in the beginning of 1902; they were perpetually scrambling up and down inside the wire, and continued to do so until April, when the supply of food came to end.

The extreme caution of sparrows enables one to scare them away for a time by a fluttering ribbon or a bit of paper, but it is only for a time; when they see that tits treat such things with contempt and venture close to them with impunity they soon summon up courage to lay aside their suspicions.

I once put a wire rat-trap under the food-stand, so arranged that it went off when a string was pulled. At first, it was baited with

corn, but while robins and tits went in and out without the least concern, not a sparrow would go near, and for a time the presence of the trap kept them away from the food-stand altogether. However, they could not resist the temptation of bread, and one or two were caught at last. But what was the use of catching them? I hadn't the heart to kill them in cold blood and used to let them go, and indeed I quite enjoyed myself the sense of joyous relief they must have felt as they flew off unharmed into the free air.

However much mischief sparrows may do, some good work must be placed to their credit. Through a great part of the year, even in February, I have seen them flying up after gnats, and it is a common thing in summer to see a sparrow in pursuit of a moth. Its efforts always seem ridiculously awkward and sometimes I fancy are ineffectual after all, but they must commonly succeed or they would not try so often and so persistently.

In the spring of 1900 the grass was covered for many days together with some kind of little black fly, and sparrows a dozen or so at a time with blackbirds, thrushes and chaffinches found a continual feast in them. I noticed again and again quite a big round ball of them collected and carried away by a thrush.

It has often been noticed that sparrows are more eager than most birds in hunting for

aphides, and I have seen a sparrow make short work of a "daddy-long-legs." In July and August I have watched them catching flies on the grass, running after them much as a wagtail does, indeed once I remember seeing a sparrow and a wagtail on the lawn at the same time, each followed by a young bird whose hunger they were trying to satisfy with flies caught in similar fashion.

Impudence is a marked characteristic of a sparrow. I have seen a starling at work in his busy, methodical way, closely followed all over the lawn by a sparrow. There he was all the time, close at the starling's elbow and ready to pounce upon whatever dainty morsel a skill superior to his own might bring to light. The starling was plainly bored by his company, but the sparrow would take no hint, and maintained his position in spite even of pointed rebuffs from the other's beak. (In the dry summer of 1911 I noticed at different times both a throstle and a blackbird attended in the same way by a sparrow.)

At another time when a starling has arrived with food in its mouth, and not daring on account of my being there to take it into its nest, has begun, after the usual unwise custom of starlings, loudly to advertise the situation, I have seen two sparrows, attracted by the noise he made, take up positions one on either side and try to snatch the food away from him. I saw this happen twice on two successive days in June, 1901.

The dusting habit of sparrows must be counted among their many iniquities when they indulge in it, as they often do, in a bed of newly-sown seeds, but it was strange to see one dusting during the hard frost of 1895; one should have thought that they were so out of the way of dusting in winter that no sparrow would have taken advantage of the rare opportunity when a long dry frost made it possible.

One day in April, 1899, a sparrow that was sitting on the food-stand close by my window made quite a song of his chirping. There was a kind of modulation of notes, continuously uttered and accompanied by a regular "beating time" movement of his tail. On another occasion I have heard a sparrow sitting alone on the ridge of a roof, singing, one could only call it, quite a little song in subdued tones.

VIII.

FINCHES, STARLINGS AND CROWS.

The spruce, handsome chaffinch (in Cheshire "pied finch") is with us all the year round, and his song here, as I suppose everywhere, is one of the most familiar of the pleasant voices of spring.

One or more chaffinches generally feed with the fowls (and sometimes they are quite extraordinarily tame, hens more so, perhaps, than cocks), but they do not often attempt to get food from the stand. Though they sometimes do, for instance in the winter of 1910-11, there was one that came regularly.

The gait of the chaffinch strikes one as peculiar, it is as a fact a hopping movement, but it gives the impression of a run.

I have frequently noticed something like rivalry or competition in singing between a chaffinch and another bird, such as a tree-pipit or a lesser whitethroat, or a willow-wren.

One night as I was going the round of the house the last thing, about 12 o'clock, I heard a great fluttering and found that a light had been left on a table close to an unshuttered window, and outside beating against the glass was a handsome cock chaffinch.

In February, 1911, a brambling was brought to me for identification. It had been shot at the other side of the village, one of a

large flock. I have never seen one in the garden itself, but not far away I think I caught sight of a small flock in March, 1899.

Far more interesting than stuffed specimens in a museum (how seldom, even at South Kensington, do you see small birds well set up, even sufficiently well to recognize the bird when met with alive!); far more interesting is such an outdoor aviary as one finds near the Town Hall in Warrington, where the birds appear to want nothing to make their lives ideally happy. In this aviary bramblings seem quite at home, and may be seen in best condition of health and feather.

Lesser redpoles, which here they call "jitties," I have seen close to the garden, and on the other side of the village they are common. I have heard of one boy catching 50 in a season with birdlime; for these he got a few pence apiece in Warrington.

A lesser redpole was given me in 1900, and a very engaging little bird he was. Though supposed to be freshly caught he was tame when first I had him, and in a very short time seemed hardly to know fear.

We used to let him out of his cage every day for an hour or so at a time. He enjoyed this immensely, and we had great difficulty in shutting him up again. He seemed fond of his cage, and would be continually going into it, but directly we went near to shut the

door he was out. I tried a long string, which we pulled from a distance as soon as he was in the cage. This answered for a time, but he got to be so knowing that when he saw the string fastened to the door he wouldn't go into the cage at all. We got the better of him in the end, however, by hanging a bit of card inside the doorway; when he pushed against this on the outside he could get by into the cage, but he couldn't open it from the inside. We only turned the card in when we wanted him to go back, leaving him free to go in and out as he liked till then. Oddly enough, he used to go in almost directly the card was in its place, and never attempted to get out again. He seemed to enjoy the exercise of flying very much, and used to go round and round the room again and again and again for the mere pleasure of it.

Though he would settle on the different things in the room and stay there for some length of time, there was never any need to clean up after him, but on the outside of his cage he was not so particular. It was a great amusement to him to sit and make faces at himself in a looking-glass.

He lived very happily with us for more than two years. In the end he died of some kind of wasting disease, but was bright and apparently happy to the last.

For some months before he died, if we let him out at meal-times, as we often did, he

had a curious habit of going to the salt-cellars and helping himself to grains of salt; once he took as many as thirteen pinches in succession! We often wondered afterwards whether he took the salt because he was ill or whether it was the salt that made him ill.

I would gladly sacrifice many fruit buds for the sake of seeing bullfinches in the garden, but never yet have I had that pleasure. Other people in the village do not regard their visits in the same light, and it is only because I hear of their being shot that I know they come here.

A bullfinch that belonged to a cousin must I think have reached the highest degree of tameness possible in a bird. Tommy, as he was called, was taken from the nest before he could fly, and he not only lost all sense of fear but showed an extraordinary personal devotion to his mistress. He used to wake her in the morning with a kiss, and warble his little greeting. He would come directly she called him, and would fly after her from room to room. This devotion was at last the cause of his death. In May, 1901, he was taken to London to a strange house, and one day hearing his mistress's voice as she came in, he flew down the stairs to meet her, and somehow struck against the hall lamp with such force that he was taken up dead.

I find the following entry in my diary for



The Two Nests.

November 9th, 1895:—"A small flight of birds passed along the trees in front of the window. Caught a momentary glance of one as it rested on the tree, and noticed shades of brown and pink and the peculiar bill. Could they have been crossbills?"

Yellow-hammers, or "goldfinches" as they are called here, are often to be seen in the fields near, but in the garden we are more familiar with the black-headed reed-bunting. We generally have one or two about the old bed of the river. I have watched the bird through a telescope on a July day, as he sat on an osier twig that was swaying in the wind, preening his feathers and uttering his short melody (?) betweenwhiles. He would begin as though he had really something to sing, then would come two halting notes, indicating doubt of his power to do much after all, which would immediately become a certainty, and his brief attempt would end in a fizzle. He would, however, be perfectly satisfied with the performance himself, and would go through it again and again almost as persistently as the yellow-hammer repeats his wearisome monotonous phrase. In the spring he has a still simpler song, if it can be called a song, consisting of two or three notes of one tone, something like the cheep of a chicken, sometimes repeated *ad infinitum*, sometimes followed by a short run of three or four notes more.

We have starlings with us all the year round, and I am glad of it. Here at any rate they do nothing but good, and they are, besides, handsome, and are interesting to watch, while their song, whether a chorus or a solo, is always cheerful. Cold and bad weather doesn't seem to affect their spirits. On Christmas morning, in 1897, although there was a hard frost, starlings were singing away merrily, one of them imitating a black-bird's note exactly.

At one time flocks of starlings used to come on autumn evenings to roost in the garden. I have watched one detachment after another arrive until the trees and evergreens were crowded with them. They did not come so much later on when the leaves had fallen, and now that the shrubbery has been thinned they do not come at all in any numbers. In spring I have heard 30 or more all singing together in this same shrubbery as late as April 2nd.

Starlings hunt for their food in a methodical, business-like way. They do not seem to have the peculiar gift by which thrushes hit on the exact spot where a worm is (I fancy they do not feed much on worms) but they go diligently over every square inch of ground in their search, probing the turf with their bills widely open, so widely that one can hardly see how they can close them on a grub when they find one.

Starlings afford another example of a strange perversion of instinct or want of common sense. If you happen to be standing anywhere near the place that one has chosen for his nest, and he arrives with his food in his mouth, instead of slipping quietly in whilst your eyes are turned away, he waits outside making as much racket as he can, and you are almost forced to notice him and cannot fail to see the whereabouts of his nest, plainly marked as it is sure to be by plentiful splashes of white.

It is quite a common thing in spring and summer to see starlings catching flies in the air, and I remember in 1906, on September 29th, the air was, one might say, full of starlings, floating about in every direction with expanded wings, and then shooting up or down or to one side when they came within reach of a fly. It was a warm, still day, and I fancy the flies they were catching were winged aphides.

For many years now as soon as the elderberries are ripe numbers of starlings, chiefly young ones, arrive on the scene, and in a few days clear them off completely.

Jays are not common here, but we have occasionally watched one in the garden as he was looking for fallen acorns in the grass close to the house.

One may pretty safely count on seeing a magpie near Arley at any time of the year,

and we do at long intervals see them in this garden and in the fields near, but they are very far from common.

I have heard of a magpie at a farm in the next village to this, many years ago indeed, who kept his eye on a turkey that was in the habit of laying eggs at a little distance from the house, and often managed to appropriate the newly-laid egg before the farm people could stop him.

Jackdaws are often about, generally in company with rooks, but I have never specially noticed them settling in the garden, as the rooks often do.

In Wales once I saw a jackdaw busily engaged exploring the back of a pony with its beak. The pony continued quietly grazing all the while, but I thought he seemed rather relieved when his visitor left.

In January, 1898, two crows appeared in the garden; I used to see them nearly every evening. A month later we saw a single crow, injured in one wing, go backwards and forwards over the whole length of the opposite bank. Up and down he went, regularly quartering the ground in his search for food. He did this for several days, and we felt quite sorry for him, he was so diligent and persevering, and it must have been so little that he could find within such comparatively narrow limits. We put food for him, which he soon found and seemed to appreciate.

He drove away rooks who tried to share it with him, but as he carried away each bit to eat in private the rooks took advantage of his absence, and the supply did not last as long as it might have done.

The poor bird was uncommonly wary: he would spy one out hundreds of yards away and disappear in a wonderful manner, seeing that he could not fly. At last some Ship Canal workmen caught him. I got him from them and kept him for three months, but though he ate pretty well it did not seem to do him much good, and he never became in the least tame to the day of his death.

We have often hoped that rooks would build in the garden; they come sometimes to the higher trees as though they had thoughts of doing so, but they have not gone beyond that as yet. In some years when acorns are ripe many rooks come here to get them (in 1911, although acorns were extraordinarily abundant, I hardly saw a single rook). I have never seen them pick up the acorns on the ground, as the jays and wood-pigeons do, but they gather them fresh for themselves from the tree.

More than once I have seen a single rook pursuing a hawk, and, on the other hand, I have seen a rook put to flight by a missel-thrush.

Rather a strange story was told me of a farmer's daughter at Heatley, near here.

She lived by herself not far from the railway station, and every day, summer and winter alike, she fed a number of rooks that habitually waited on her bounty. One winter's day, it appears, she threw down food for a few rooks that were in a tree behind her house. The next day they were there again, and again she fed them, and so it grew into a regular thing, and they came expecting to be fed like so many fowls every day of the year. My informant often watched the proceeding, and said that the birds seemed to know their benefactress quite well and not to be at all afraid of her, though they were as shy of strangers as any other rooks.

Skylarks are abundant in the neighbourhood, and often in the garden we hear one singing overhead. I have seen a lark singing his regular song on the ground, and have seen one perched on iron railings by the side of a road holding a largish brown moth in its bill, and at the same time uttering repeatedly two or three notes of its song.

Larks are very fond of dusting in roads. I remember being struck one hot day in June by the number of dusting larks I met with in a ten-mile ride. Without any exaggeration there must have been one every twenty yards on an average for the whole distance.

IX.

OTHER BIRDS.

The wild shriek of swifts, as they dash and wheel through the air at their topmost speed, seems to express such intense delight in freedom and motion and power, that it imparts something of the same sense of exhilaration to the beholder, at least, I know it is so with me.

Swifts, or "long-wings," as they are equally well-named in Cheshire, usually find their food at some height in the air, but one day in the beginning of July (1899) I noticed a number of swifts, with a great many swallows and sand-martins, skimming the surface of a patch of clover which had been left standing in a field near the garden. I did not discover what it was, but the attraction must have been something unusual, for the number of birds passing and re-passing in the very small space was so extraordinary that it was really difficult to understand how they could avoid collision. All were concentrated in the one spot, and never seemed to go beyond it for more than a couple of yards.

In 1896 there were swifts about all August, and I saw a pair on October 19th. I was told by a friend who was at Brighton in June, 1899, that whenever the band played on the sea front four swifts would appear and fly

round and round the bandstand. She never noticed them there, she said, when the band was not playing, although it was her favourite seat at all times of the day.

Nightjars are not uncommon on "mosses" in Lancashire, only a mile or so away, and in Cheshire on the Carrington side of Warburton, but they are less frequent just about here. One year, however (1902), a pair evidently had made their nest in the rough tussocky ground which at that time covered the bed of the old river. From the middle of June to the beginning of July we were treated every evening to the full programme of their entertainment, both vocal and acrobatic. Several times one heard little snatches of the "song," even in the middle of the day in fine, hot weather, but nine p.m., sometimes a little earlier, was the usual time for beginning. The whirring would go on for an hour at a time, with hardly any cessation, but often varying in tone and volume, now swelling out louder and then sinking again. We often saw the two birds playing about together in the air, one or other of them making what is described as a "whipthong" noise and smiting its wings together like a pigeon. Sometimes when they first settled again after a flight, instead of the loud whirring there would be every now and then a soft, liquid, bubbling sound.

A favourite resting-place was the bare

bough of a Scotch fir, and here as it lay lengthways and perfectly still the bird looked so like part of the branch itself that I couldn't persuade a friend who was with me that it was a bird until he actually saw it fly away. After July 4th we heard no more of them, and for a day or two before that the whirring was much more interrupted, in shorter spells, and varied more in intensity and clearness than usual.

Before the next spring came round the Ship Canal had covered the river-bed with another layer of mud dredgings, and we have neither seen nor heard a nightjar in the garden since, but in June, 1910, I heard from the keeper that he had watched one flying round an old black-poplar just opposite the garden gate, flapping the ends of the boughs with his wings and catching the moths that were driven out.

One of the most delightful of country sounds is, I think, the laugh of the green woodpecker, and when I heard that a pair of woodpeckers were constantly to be seen (January and February, 1901) about some old poplars not far away, and that early one morning one was working at the rotten posts of a fence in the very next field, my hopes were raised that even yet that welcome sound might be heard from the garden. But the birds turned out to be greater-spotted woodpeckers and not green, and these do not

express the joy of living so plainly. I have several times since seen one of these spotted woodpeckers in the garden. One day (in April, 1908) I watched the bird for a long time as he visited in succession each of the posts in a wire fence by the old river-bed.

Green woodpeckers are rare in this part of the country, but "lesser-spotted" are found in Dunham Park, and the keeper tells me he has seen them in Warburton Fox-cover.

In the low-lying meadows by the Bollin, half a mile away, kingfishers have always been found, haunting the little water-courses and ditches, but at one time we were able to see them even from the garden itself.

In the making of the Ship Canal a part of the old river just beyond us was left unfilled up, and formed a fair-sized pool. Kingfishers used to come to this, and as long as there was any water at all in the old river-bed I often stood outside this house and watched the blue streak of light as the bird, with his peculiar shrill cry, flew straight as an arrow past me. Even in August, 1899, when what remained of the river was nothing but seething mud, in which I am sure there could have been no living fish, I disturbed a kingfisher from an overhanging branch on the bank.

A friend in the village, a keen observer of birds, has often seen, he tells me, that when kingfishers fly from the meadows to the "pits"

on higher ground they first rise straight up into the air and then dart off in a perfect bee-line to their destination. He also said that kingfishers invariably desert a nest that has been touched. He was repairing the embankment of the Bollin once when a kingfisher's nest was accidentally laid open, and although the nest itself was not injured, and the two young ones in it were nearly fledged and fought at his hand like little owls, when two days later he was at the place again he found them both dead, unable to find food for themselves and forsaken by their parents.

The coming of the cuckoo seems to be of more interest to people here than any event in natural history, and cuckoos are, I should say, more plentiful with us than in many places, and are nearly as often seen as heard.

I must have seen a dozen one day in May from the high road during a short drive of a few miles, and, generally speaking, in May not a day (I should not be far out if I said not an hour of the day) goes by without our knowing by sight as well as sound that there are cuckoos in the garden.

The widespread belief that cuckoos turn into hawks in winter is still seriously held in Cheshire to-day, even by farmers.

For three days in the end of July, 1905, I was able from my study window to watch a young cuckoo being fed by its foster-parent, a meadow-pipit. The cuckoo was sitting on

a wire fence on the opposite bank. At first it sat in a floppy kind of way, with its wings hanging down on either side, as if to keep its balance, but the next day it seemed to have gained strength and sat up better. The little pipit (if it was always the same, and I never saw more than one at once) was not away for more than a minute or two, except on the third day, when it was pouring wet and food seemed harder to find. As soon as the cuckoo knew that its nurse was coming it began opening its mouth and quivering its wings, while the poor little dupe that brought the food would alight a short distance off and run along the wire to its side, then, looking ridiculously small for the job, it would manage to pop something into its mouth, not all in one go, but in two or three. It was curious to notice that every time after being fed the ungrateful cuckoo gave spiteful pecks at the poor deluded little slave who was working so hard to supply its wants.

One day in May (1908) a cuckoo alighted on a tree close to the house, attended by two small birds. He seemed rather uneasy in their company, and kept looking suspiciously at them; they, I fancy, were trying to make up their minds to attack him, but they let "I dare not" wait so long upon "I would" that he went off unmolested.

Barn owls are comparatively common. Farmers are learning to understand better

their great usefulness, and at least to leave them alone. Some, indeed, do more than this, and I know of two cases where the pigeon cote in the hay-loft has been given up to them. Through the back door of one of these cotes I have been able to see at my ease the funny little round-faced hissing young ones, and I was quite surprised to find how very long it is before the fully-fledged birds turn out of the nest. My friend at Heatley was one of those who entertained the owls, and he told me that if an old bird accidentally dropped a mouse as he made his way into the loft, he never by any chance attempted to recover it. He said he used on winter evenings to see the owls fly along the eaves of the neighbouring houses and inside the roof of a hayshed close by, beating with their wings to drive out the sparrows that were roosting there, and he found the remains of a great many sparrows in their casts.

A barn-owl appeared in the garden one day in May, 1899. It did all it could to hide itself in the bushes and thick Scotch firs, but in spite of its efforts the birds in the neighbourhood, led on apparently by the black-birds, found it out again and again, and kept up a ceaseless noise and commotion as long as it was here. (I noticed that the fowls, both cocks and hens, joined in the general clamour.) In December, however, I have seen an owl fly into one of the out-houses in

the middle of the day, and even sit calmly in full view on a leafless tree without attracting the neast notice from any bird.

The keeper tells me that brown, long-eared, and short-eared owls are all to be found in Warburton at times, brown owls nesting here regularly.

Sparrow hawks come to us occasionally, but not so often as kestrels. The difference in the behaviour of small birds with regard to these two hawks is remarkable, and plainly shows that they have, as a rule, little to fear from kestrels. One November day, for instance, a sparrow hawk appeared in a tree just opposite my window, causing the greatest commotion and consternation among sparrows and all other birds. A week later a kestrel came to the same place at the same time of the day and stayed about for a considerable time, but none of the small birds took the least notice of him.

My friend at Heatley, who used to have the owls as his tenants, once (in 1897) shot a sparrow hawk near his house that had a screaming blackbird in his talons, and was tearing off from its back strips of feathers and flesh together without apparently having tried to kill it first. He told me that twice he had seen a lark escape from a sparrow hawk. In both instances the lark's idea seemed to be to rise higher than the hawk, and the two kept going up together. The hawk made repeated

stoops at his quarry, but each time he missed, the lark striking now to the right and now to the left. The contest ended in both cases by the lark dashing down to cover from a great height; one time it found refuge among the shrubs in a garden, and on the second occasion it came down faster than he could describe with its wings closed against its sides, and just slanting over the tops of some fruit trees opposite, dashed straight into the kitchen. To do this it had to pass through the sliding door of the back-kitchen, which was not more than two feet open, and then through the open door of the kitchen. Strange to say, it was able to check its speed sufficiently to alight uninjured on the floor, though utterly exhausted and helpless. My friend picked it up, and having held it for some minutes in his hand, let it fly away seeming none the worse for its perilous adventure. The hawk, he said, sailed calmly once or twice round the house before he took himself off.

The following is part of a letter I received in November, 1894 :—"A sparrow hawk took up his nightly abode on the transome of the top light of a window in Arley Chapel in the autumn of 1890, and remained constant to that roosting place until, at all events, May, 1892, when we left Arley. How long it stayed there after we left I cannot say, but I was told last winter that it had disappeared.

The hawk was always solitary; I never saw it with a companion. The roost was always exactly on the same stone."

One has heard stories of other birds living the same kind of lonely existence, but I never saw a very satisfactory explanation as to how it is that they come to do so. The pairing instinct is strong in birds, and it must be a powerful motive that makes them disregard it. We are told that if a bird of prey loses its mate it does not take it long to find another. May we suppose that solitary birds like this at Arley are waiting in readiness for such an emergency? Or is such a bird simply one that, being old and cantankerous, is bored by female society, or feels himself unequal to the cares of a family?

All birds seem to give a sparrow hawk a wide berth, but one often sees a kestrel pursued, most frequently perhaps by a rook, but sometimes by a peewit or a gull. In October, 1908, I saw from the garden a kestrel persecuted by two rooks. He kept dodging their attacks, but didn't seem to mind them much and never turned on them. Again, at the end of October, 1906, I was watching a kestrel as it hovered over a field close by, when I saw it suddenly and violently assaulted by a missel-thrush. It gave way for some space, but when in a minute or two the thrush flew off, it returned to its first



The Food Stand.

position and continued hovering just as if never interrupted.

I have heard from a man here, an old gamekeeper, a story like one that I have read somewhere before. He had seen a kestrel pounce upon what he supposed to be a mouse and fly off with it. Presently, to his surprise, it fell like a stone to the ground and he picked it up quite dead; close by it he found a dead stoat.

Wild duck breed in the Bollin meadows and may sometimes be seen in the garden as they fly over; we see wild geese, too, sometimes, and occasionally a heron. I was much struck one day by the flight of a pair of swans over the garden. They were not flying high, but side by side, with their long necks stretched out, with strong regular wing-beats; without haste and without effort, they held on their straight and even course at a good steady pace. It gave me rather a strange impression of dignity and power.

One or two pairs of wood-pigeons build in the garden every year, but they are not as common in Warburton as in more wooded country, though sometimes large flocks visit us in autumn (*e.g.*, in 1910). My friend at Heatley told me that one year when a great many had come to feed on acorns in a wood near his house, he had hoped from the shelter of a wooden hut to make a good bag, but he found that in spite of their numbers they

were extremely wideawake, and though they covered the ground in every other direction, they carefully eschewed a trail of Indian corn, with which he had hoped to tempt them within reach of his gun.

Turtledoves are fairly common in Cheshire, but there are many more in some years than in others. I only remember their nesting in this garden once (in 1899), when they were to be seen on the lawn every day.

Pheasants are constant visitors; we are very seldom without them at any time of the year, and since parts of the old river bed have been left wild they have taken to breeding here. We have often watched from our window the cock pheasant strutting about the hen, ruffling up his feathers and displaying himself to advantage like a turkey-cock. The tufts of ear-like feathers on each side of the head are a marked feature in the cock at the courting season and give the bird a curious Mephistophelian look.

We noticed once when we came upon them unawares as they were feeding on corn we had put for them, that the hen, instead of scuttling off like the cock, clapped close to the ground almost within arm's length, evidently trusting for concealment to her sober colouring.

One cock who made himself very much at home here in the early part of 1901, and stayed with us for more than three months,

unlike most that have been here, was for ever crowing and clapping his wings. He always roosted on the same tree, and every evening just before it got dark took care to let us know that he was going to bed.

In October, 1910, there was a cock that used to amuse himself by sitting for half an hour at a time on the broad top of a clipped yew hedge. Several hens would sometimes sit there with him : once we saw seven on the top of the hedge at once.

I have heard that in Japan at the time of an earthquake, extraordinary commotion is noticed among pheasants. There was a slight shock of earthquake here on December 17th, 1896, at 5-30 in the morning, and a working man who happened then to be near the Fox-cover was especially struck by the noise that pheasants were making in the wood.

Nearly every year we have partridge visitors, a family party; in 1895 there were thirteen young ones with the old pair, and last year, 1911, again there were twelve. They always seem happy and light-hearted; they dance and jump, they play games like "hide-and-seek" or "kiss-in-the-ring," round about and in and out the drooping feathery branches of a deadara, that just touch the ground, and in the intervals they sun themselves on the walks.

I heard very few corncrakes in 1911, but

they are common enough most years. In 1908, one took up his abode in the old river-bed just outside our window, and used to serenade us every night (May 8th to 26th). He went on incessantly, exactly like a clock, quite regularly and evenly. He was at it when we went to bed about 12 and never ceased or varied in the least as long as we were awake to hear him.

What was once the bed of the Mersey has now (1912), thanks to the Ship Canal engineers, become land comparatively speaking dry. But, of course, the process of filling up was gradual, and for some years more or less water was left in the river-bed. During one stage, which lasted perhaps ten years, waterhens, which here are known as coots (true coots are called "baldheaded"), became quite common in the garden. We used to see them rather as waders than swimmers, but we did constantly see them running about on the soft mud, washing in the little pools, and, as pairing time came on, fighting desperately together. In the autumn a dozen or more would be feeding on the lawn at once, and in the winter some would often come to pick up food with the fowls, I have even seen one make an attempt to get fat from a net hung out for the tits. We often saw them perching quite high up in a tree. In 1907, I had a photograph given me showing a waterhen's nest in a small wood

near Lymm. It was in a tree four feet six inches from the ground, and 200 yards from any water.

Golden plover come to the Bollin meadows every winter, but not so many I think as when the land was more liable to floods, at least I do not hear their clear whistle as often as formerly. It is not unusual to see them flocking with peewits.

Peewits are called simply "plover" here. There are large flocks on every side though not actually in the garden.

In August 1897, there was an extraordinary concourse of peewits on the bank of the river just opposite. The noise they made was loud and continuous, and birds were flying backwards and forwards all the while. The whole of the bank for a hundred yards or more was covered with them, others were at the water's edge, washing like ducks or playing about and chasing one another, others were picking among the stones or drinking. All the time the noise never ceased; and a friend said it reminded her of the gulls on the coast of Ireland that she heard on her way to America. The assembly on that particular day (August 13th) broke up about one p.m., having lasted for more than an hour. Frequently during the rest of the month, peewits gathered at the same place, but not in the same numbers, and one day in December, 1898, I noticed that there was

something of the same kind on a small scale going on.

In June, 1901, when the river-bed had been further filled up and the pools transformed into a muddy swamp, we were able from our windows to watch a brood of peewit chicks from the time when they were first hatched until they were old enough to go out into the world. They were most interesting when as quite little things with backs the colour of the eggs they had left, they busily hunted about for food, or all crowded together under the wings of their mother for short spells of rest and warmth.

Snipe breed in the Bollin meadows, and common sandpipers were always by the river and the river-bed as long as there was any water at all in it, always at least in August. They still seem to remember their old haunts, and visit us occasionally. In the latter part of August, 1910, there was one that had some feathers out of place in one of its wings and appeared unable to fly. He seemed content enough and I wondered if he would try to face the winter here, but whether by his own act and deed, or by someone else's, he had gone when I looked for him in September. In August, 1911, a sandpiper used to frequent a pit in fields a good way from the river.

In April and May, 1910, a pair of red-shanks were constantly to be seen in the

Bollin meadows towards Dunham, but no nest was found. In 1911 they were there again, and the keeper found a nest not far from the Fox-cover, but I think he must have told too many of his friends about it, for within a week of the eggs being hatched it was deserted.

I very well remember a good many years ago, though I can find no note of the exact year, that I saw a black tern flying backwards and forwards like a swallow over a wet spot in the corner of the garden, and the next day I saw what was probably the same bird flying in the same way over a large farmyard pit close by the road, about a mile from here.

Since the Ship Canal has been opened gulls have been among the most frequent and the most noticeable of all birds in these parts. Whenever a field is ploughed up, however far it may be from the canal, there you are sure to find gulls, and when the plough is at work in the fields opposite, which are close to its banks, the gulls come in crowds and form one long white line as the furrows are turned, the birds continually rising before the plough and settling down again when it has passed. I have identified black-headed and lesser black-backed gulls among them, but have never attempted to decide to what species the majority belong. Indeed, I do not feel very competent to do so, having always found it sufficiently difficult

to distinguish the variations of gull plumage at different ages and at different times of the year.

In 1908 the keeper (Mr. J. Porter) showed me a Bohemian waxwing, a hooded crow and a hobby, all of which he had shot in Warburton within a year or two previously.

He has told me since of stockdoves ("blue rocks" he calls them) nesting here, and a curious story of a wren's nest on an ash-stump in the Fox-cover in 1910, on the top of which a hedgesparrow built her nest. Both broods, he said, hatched about the same time.

I have received from a friend in Northamptonshire (Mr. G. S. Garrett, of Little Houghton) a photograph showing a similar instance of two nests built one above the other. He says: "A piece of bark about 20 inches by 13, fell off an elm tree into a fence and dried up into a tube-like shape. A spotted flycatcher built its nest in the top and laid 5 eggs and a brown wren in the bottom laying 7 eggs The nests are now in the Rochester Museum."

X.

BRITISH MAMMALS.

The whole extent of the garden, with its croft and orchard, is not three acres, but a fair proportion of the British mammals are from time to time to be found there.

The old church, largely built of timber, picturesque and quaint, stands within a few yards of the house and its roof affords shelter to many bats. We find the wings of moths, the remnants of their feasts, scattered on the floor (I have noticed the wings of a tortoise-shell butterfly among them), and I have found there more than one dead body of a common bat; I cannot say whether that is the only kind we have, but in 1908 a bat was seen near the house which, from the description given of its size and manner of flight, may perhaps have been a noctule.

On May 28th, 1899, there was an eclipse of the sun; it was only partial, and made very little difference to the light, but just so long as it lasted, from 3 to 4.30 p.m., I saw a bat flying busily round and about the church.

The soil is light and worms seem to be abundant, but one hardly ever sees a mole-hill in this part of Cheshire. One day, however, in December, 1899, we noticed that a bed of parsley had withered in a mysterious way, and when we came to look, the ground

was quite undermined with mole-runs. These were very shallow, and there was no sign of a hillock above. Many of the roots of the parsley had been entirely eaten off, and we saw that nearly all that remained in the bed were full of grubs. These grubs it must have been, I suppose, that attracted the mole, but it is curious that such an exceptional condition of the roots should have been discovered, considering how seldom there is any sign of a mole in the neighbourhood. We noticed that the root of a strong raspberry cane on one side of the parsley bed had been eaten off in the same way, but it is not very likely that this would have had grubs in it.

Hedgehogs are not uncommon and we sometimes see them in broad daylight. In July one year (1900) every evening for about a week we used to see a large hedgehog running along a broad gravel walk close to the windows of the house. It came always at the same time, "just at the edge of dark," as they say here, and it always took the same route and disappeared at the same place.

Later on in the month we found a young one, a most delightful little animal, as friendly and tame as possible. We used to feed him with milk every day as long as he stayed here, which was about a week, and once when we expected some boys in the garden we brought him into the house and put him in a box. He strongly objected to

the imprisonment, loudly protesting all the time in a voice like the squeaking of a rat, and it was surprising to see how nearly he managed to get out, though the sides of the box were almost two feet high.

Stoats, commonly called weasels with us, were fairly common when we had more rats and rabbits, but we do not often see one now (1912). We had a white terrier that killed several, though I had an idea that dogs looked on stoats as a kind of ferret and did not hurt them.

We can count a fox among our occasional visitors. I have watched one for some time that was smelling about among the shrubs just opposite to the front door about eight o'clock on a Sunday morning.

We are out of the regular beat of the Cheshire Hounds here, and I fancy the secret slaying of a fox is not accounted a very heinous crime, certainly the foxes that are often reported soon disappear. In 1899 a fox had its "earth" in the Abbey Croft, a field next to the garden, and we used to like to hear him barking in the still summer evenings. In the end, however, the keepers were too many for him, and he had to shift his quarters or else it may have been his lease of life ran out.

We suffered very much at one time from the plague of rats. They infested the out-buildings and the house itself, and for a long

while we were in despair about them. We tried poison, with the result that dead rats made the kitchen uninhabitable and entailed the expense and nuisance of taking up the floor, and still they came. We tried every kind of trap, we had the whole of the outside walls examined, and every possible entrance hole stopped, so at least we thought, but still they came. At last we found that the simple expedient of doing away with the ashpit deprived the premises of their chief attraction in a rat's eyes, for then we had to burn on the kitchen fire all the vegetable and other refuse that formerly found its way to the ashpit, and provided such abundant and appetizing food. Certain it is that since we did this, more than twelve years ago now (1912), we never have had a rat in the house.

I have heard of large young fowls being killed by rats at farms not far away, but I do not remember that they ever took one of our chickens; indeed, at a time when we used to see many rats there, a hen sat in the stable and safely hatched her chicks. I recollect an old rat that used to come every day to feed with the fowls without any objection to his presence on their part.

Rabbits were another great nuisance. They had burrows among the tree-roots on the river bank and no one seemed able to get them out or to shoot them, so between what they ate and what they dug up, we hadn't

much pleasure in the garden. At last we cut off so much of the garden as we could surround with wire netting and left the rest to take its chance. No sooner had we done this than, for what reason I cannot tell, the rabbits disappeared completely, and for two or three years we hardly ever saw one on our own ground, though they seemed to be as plentiful as usual elsewhere.

We have sometimes caught long-tailed field-mice that were eating the peas, and the cats seemed to find voles and shrews pretty often.

I must confess to rather a weakness for common mice; they are pretty to look at and amusing in their ways. To give an instance of their ingenuity and enterprise, I remember some time in the summer of 1899, when we used to have a basin of sugar left in our room at night, a certain mouse appeared to think that it was placed there for his own special benefit, at any rate he was accustomed to help himself very freely to it. We could hear him working away to get a lump over the side of the basin, then rolling it along to the edge of the table and letting it fall to the floor, along which he would again roll it to a hole under the skirting-board. Sometimes he would take in this way as many as three or four lumps of sugar in one night. Besides the sugar there was often bread and butter left in the room between two plates, and one

morning when I took the top one off out jumped the mouse. I cannot imagine how it got in. It certainly couldn't make its way out again, which one should have thought a far easier thing to do. The plates seemed to be exactly as I had left them the night before, and I could not see that any of the bread and butter had been eaten.

I remember what seems to me an extraordinary instance of a mouse's power of smelling out food. In the new parish church here (consecrated in 1885) the vestry is in the tower, and its ceiling, which is the floor of the bellringing-room, must be nearly 20 ft. from the ground. Just under this ceiling were suspended at one time three very long texts; they were drawn up by pulleys with a rope that was fastened off about six feet from the floor. One of these texts was used at harvest festivals, and a fringe of corn had been left round the border, but all three were elaborately done up together in brown paper, so that none of the corn could be seen. Happening to be at the church one day I found the caretaker had brought out these texts into the churchyard, because he had seen, he said, a mouse running up to them by the suspending cord. Sure enough, when he undid the wrapping the poor little thing was there, and I am sorry to say was promptly killed. I thought its wonderful cleverness deserved a better fate. The church was

newly built with concrete floors, and there was no regular food supply to attract mice, so this particular mouse must have come in casually on the mere chance of picking up something, and it must from the floor, nearly 20 ft. below, have found out that there was corn in one of the bundles of texts behind the brown paper that covered them, and I think more wonderful still, it must have discovered the only way of reaching it, along the suspending cord.

There used to be an old piano in the Parish Room close to the new church. This was not often used and one day when we lifted the cover from the back part of the keyboard we found snugly placed in a corner of the bass notes an empty mouse's nest, quite round like a bird's, and beautifully made of dried bits of grass and coloured worsted. It seems strange that a mouse should have found such a place for its nest, and stranger still that in a new large bare room, with a solid wood-block floor, it should have been able unobserved to go in and out continually to fetch the materials for it. This it must have done, since none came from the room itself.

The long broad garden walk by the side of the house seems to be a favourite thoroughfare for hares; we constantly see them passing at all times of the year. I wish myself there were not quite so many hares

in Warburton as there are. We could do very well with fewer in the gardens and orchards, and there would then be less inducement to hold such frequent public coursing meetings, which, in my opinion, we could do very well without. Some years before 1900 a large number were imported and turned down. These were at first a great annoyance to everybody, and did much damage to fruit trees even in mild open weather; it was almost unbelievable the height to which they could reach, gnawing off every bit of bark all the way round. They were, besides, far too thick upon the ground for their own comfort. I was told by a man who worked on the estate that he often came across bucks fighting together; they fought so savagely, he said, that they would hardly get out of his way, and almost knocked up against him. They begin fighting, it appears from his account, by giving slaps with their forefeet, but in the end they go on to worry at one another like dogs.

XI.

DOGS AND CATS.

It is hard to say which is the most wonderful, to see how a dog's intelligence can be developed by companionship with man or to look at a Great Dane and a toy terrier together, and to remember that both breeds have by man's agency been produced from the same original stock.

Cats, on the other hand, have never left their wild nature far behind, and can easily return to it, as indeed they often do. Dogs are almost entirely dependent on their human friends, but most cats do something for their living, and some without going wild will find all their own food. I remember one cat in particular that did this; she was an old cat when first I came, and lived on with me for more than fourteen years. As long as she was strong and able to hunt she never came into the house and never asked for food (she was tame enough when she met us out of doors) it was only when she got to be old and feeble that she turned to us and learnt to value the warmth of a fire-side. She must have been 20, and may well have been nearer 25 when she died, and her great age showed itself plainly by every outward sign. In her prime she was a large, handsome animal, but she dwindled down to

absolute skin and bone literally; her face lost all its roundness and got to be quite small and her voice died almost completely away. Towards the last she spent her days on one particular stool by the fire, eating very little, but apparently content and even happy, and responding as best as she could to any attention. I do not remember her ever lying down at that time, she was always sitting and always on the same spot, which was worn quite shiny in consequence. At last one day she failed to appear, and we never found her body.

The oddest cat we ever had was a black one that came to us of her own accord in 1881. She had such a vile temper and was altogether so uncanny that she might well have been possessed by an evil spirit.

When she had been with us only a few days, I found her hanging on to the wire-netting of an outhouse door, evidently trying to get some pigeons that she could see behind it. Very soon afterwards another cat was drowned for persistently taking pigeons, and it really seemed as if Blacky understood, for never after that did she look at a pigeon with evil intent; she would walk through a number of them as they fed on the ground, and so little did they fear her that they hardly moved out of her way.

We had a canary once (and we must have had him for more than 10 years), whose noisy

song was so distracting that we used sometimes to put him down on a table and cover his cage with a cloth. One day we went out and left him there, and must have forgotten to shut the room door, for when we came back we found the cover off the cage and the cat curled up fast asleep by the side of it. The canary was unharmed and didn't appear to be even frightened; he was hopping about in his cage quite content and at ease. That the cat should have pulled off the cover and then have left the bird alone seemed the more astonishing, because she was a hardened and incurable thief.

Blacky knew the time for afternoon tea, and was always there to the minute. However, when something that came to her brought off all her hair and made her a pitiable object, she seemed to know of herself that she was not presentable, and though we did nothing to prevent her she never came into the drawing-room again until her hair had grown; then she appeared regularly as before.

There may be some truth in the old saying, "Dogs care for people and cats for places," but individuals differ very much; great love of home is often seen in dogs, and strong personal affection in cats.

A cat was born here in 1897 and lived with us for two years like any other cat. She was indeed rather more intelligent than many.

She had evidently observed the manner of opening a door, for when she wanted to get into a room she used to rattle at the handle. One day she came and rattled at the door-handle of the study where I was sitting, but instead of coming in when the door was opened, she led me to the drawing-room, and standing up put her paw on the handle of the door: as plainly as possible she had fetched me to let her in.

Now although this cat was made a great deal of with us and seemed to have a strong personal affection for me, spending most of her time with me, one fine day she took herself off and disappeared altogether.

As weeks went by and we heard nothing of her we concluded she had met with the fate to which pitiless game preservation has consigned many another cat. But after about three months I saw her in the garden, when though she followed me she refused to be touched. For weeks again we never set eyes on her, and we almost came to believe that it was her wraith I had seen. At last I happened to notice her sitting outside a cottage not 200 yards from this house, by which I passed almost every day of my life, but though she looked up when I called her by name she would not come to me. After a year or two she very frequently came into the garden and was willing enough to be stroked, but she never entered this house again until

(in 1909) the old man at the cottage died, and the home she had chosen for herself was broken up. Then of her own accord she returned to us as a matter of course, and up to the day of her death (in November, 1911) was as friendly and affectionate as possible.

It is odd that a cat should thus deliberately have chosen to leave a home that was her birthplace, and where she had been more than kindly treated. We thought at the time that it might have been through jealousy of her own kitten, that she often found in the study, but if of so jealous a disposition, why should she go to be one of a family of cats in which as the last-comer she could hardly hope to take the first place?

The man she went to sometimes worked here, and as he was fond of cats might have taken a fancy to this one, and possibly did something to entice her away. If this was so, it is clear that a cat's affection is not always for places rather than people.

The strangest part of it all is to me not that she should have left us for the cottage, but that at the same time her whole behaviour towards us should have so entirely changed that she wouldn't let us touch her, and couldn't be induced to set foot in the house.

The old man to whom this cat betook herself was quite a character in his way. He could neither read nor write, having been put to work on a farm when he was eight years

old, but he took a very intelligent interest in things. His house was an asylum for stray cats and you would find him on a winter's evening sitting in front of a good fire with a circle of half a dozen cats round him, all staring like himself at the grate. He used to have a fancy for clocks; there must have been five or six of all sizes perpetually ticking away in his kitchen, not to speak of others that were there but refused to tick any longer. He was not content, like other cottagers, with a candle or cheap light, but had hanging from the low ceiling a large paraffin lamp, which had cost him at least fifteen shillings.

He was never married, and since his mother died, some thirty years ago, he never had a woman in the house, and yet few women could have kept it cleaner than he did himself.

A white terrier that we had for ten years from 1888 used to associate words with ideas even when spoken in ordinary conversation and not directly to him. For instance, if he was lying apparently asleep before the fire, and we happened in talking without reference to him to mention any words that he knew, such as "dog," or "carriage," or "walk," he would look up or perhaps just wag his tail.

The same dog had a wonderful gift of reckoning time. He knew Sunday perfectly well, and he knew it the first thing in the

morning, before anything had been done to mark it as different from other days. Generally he would lie on the rug at breakfast time and be quite alert afterwards and on the watch to go out with us, but on Sundays he went straight to his basket when we came down and did not move or look up when breakfast was over. From very early days he used to go with my wife to afternoon Sunday School. He knew exactly the time when she ought to get ready to start, and if then she didn't move he would get up and go to her, and he gave her no peace until she went to dress. When he arrived at the school he would curl himself up on an old shawl in a corner of the room, and until the Lord's Prayer before the final grace of the dismissal prayers he would not stir. Directly he heard the Lord's Prayer, he would get up in readiness, but he never left his corner until the prayers were finished. On one Sunday in the month there was catechising in the Church, instead of Sunday school, and Snap was wont to be shut up by himself in the schoolroom until the service was over. This he didn't much care for, and often when he had started joyously as usual for his walk to the school, three-quarters of a mile away, as soon as he came near enough to hear the church bell ringing, he quietly turned round and went home. When he had been with us for about eight years we took him to London

for several weeks. He made the best of it, and seemed to enjoy himself in a way, but it was almost pathetic to see the change directly we got out of the train on our way back. We had to drive three miles in a fly, and though Snap's place was at the bottom under our feet, as soon as we got within a mile of home, he seemed to know the smell of the country and was all excitement, and when he found himself really at home he was quite beside himself with joy and did not rest until he had visited in turn every familiar nook and corner in the garden, then he threw himself down on his own rug in his own house with a sigh of relief and satisfaction.

I remember the same love of home in the case of another dog, a mongrel long-haired terrier that I had from a puppy. When he was more than ten years old he was taken to live in Hertfordshire. His friends there were devoted to him and did all they could to make him happy, but his nature quite changed, he lost his former boisterous spirits and seemed rather to endure than to enjoy life. After he had been away four years I brought him back; he was then, of course, old as dogs go, nearly 15, but it seemed as though the intervening years had been a dream, and he was himself again at once, just as joyous, noisy and determined-spirited as he had ever been, and fell into all his old ways of life, as if he had been absent only a day.

This same dog, Stumpy we called him, had one little practical joke that showed a sense of humour. At a farm about half-a-mile away there was a pond, or as we say here a "pit," separated only by a hedge from the road. On this pit there were nearly always ducks and it was a favourite amusement of Stumpy's to steal quietly up to the road side of the hedge just above them, and suddenly give several loud barks. He did this for the simple pleasure of seeing the startled ducks rush quacking and flapping to the other side of the pond; for he ran on again afterwards perfectly unconcerned, content and pleased with himself, and I never knew him take the slightest notice of ducks or fowls at any other time.

I remember a rather wonderful instance of intelligence shown by Stumpy's father when I had him with me at Oxford. He arrived there for the first time late one evening; the next day I took him for a walk with friends towards Godstow, and when nearly there we stood to watch some men shooting. Sandy hated the sound of a gun, and when we remembered him and looked round, he had gone. As he was quite strange to the place I scarcely expected to see him again, but I found him waiting for me outside the door in Holywell Street when I got home.

I may say in bringing these notes to a

conclusion that they have in substance been taken from a diary, and that I have not had to depend upon my memory for what they contain, as I used to put down in this diary at the moment any happenings connected with Natural History that I noticed and wished to remember. When after several years I came to look through the entries, the idea occurred to me that possibly some of the matter might have an interest for others; I may very likely, of course, be mistaken in this, all the more so, perhaps, because these notes do represent what to me has been a source of very great interest. I have had to live for many years an unexciting life, in an out-of-the-way country place, with little society, and with few opportunities of getting away for a holiday; and yet with the garden itself, and the little world it embraces, in making the acquaintance of its inhabitants and watching the doings of their daily life, I can safely say I do not know what it is to be dull. Of course, I do not pretend that Natural History has supplied all the interests I have had outside my work, for I am thankful to say there is hardly anything in the world that doesn't interest me, but it certainly is the case that the tom-tits and the robins and the other birds have always been to me as human friends, and have continually provided me with amusement and pleasure.

INDEX.

Aviary, Outdoor—at Warrington, 68.

"Baldhead" - Ashore from coast
Barn Owls, 82.

Bats in Old Church, 95.

Birds as friends, 11. 112. Power of recognizing one another, 40, 41.

Blackbirds, 17, 22-25, 64, 65, 83, 84.

Blackcaps, 31.

Black Tern, 93.

✓ "Blueback" Cheshire for Fieldfare, 22.

✓ "Blue-cap" Cheshire for Tomtit, 38.

✓ "Blue rock" local name for Stockdove, 94.

Bohemian Waxwing, 94.

Brambling, 67-68.

Bullfinch, 70.

Canary, 104.

Cat, changing its home, 106. Extreme old age, 103.

Uncanny spirit, 104.

Chiff-chaffs, 33.

Chaffinches, 64-67.

Coal-tits, 38, 41-43.

Contrivances for baffling sparrows on the Food-stand, 59-64.

✓ "Coot" Cheshire for Waterhen, 90.

Corncrakes, 89.

Creeper, Tree-, 56.

Crossbills, 71.

Crows, Carrion-, 74. Hooded-, 94.

Cuckoos, 81.

Dogs, their intelligence, their love of home, 108-110.

Dogs and cats compared, 103.

Earthquake and Pheasants, 89.
Eclipse, a bat flying about while it lasted, 95.

Fieldfares, 22.
Figs self-sown, 6.
Flycatchers, Spotted-, 48-51. Pied-, 51.
Food for birds, 39.
Food receptacles, 40.
Food-stand, 59-64.
Fox, 97.
Frosts in spring, 3.

Garden-warbler, 34.
Golden crested wrens, 32.
Golden plover, 91.
Goldfinches, 57.
— "Goldfinch" Cheshire for Yellow-hammer, 71.
Greater Spotted woodpecker, 79.
Great Tits, 37, 38, 41.
Greenfinches, 57.
Gulls, 93.

Hares, 101.
Hawfinches, 58.
Hawks, Hobby, 94. Kestrel, 84. Sparrowhawk, 84.
Hedgehog, 96.
Hedgesparrows, 35.
Heron, 87.
Hobby, 94.
Holly berries sometimes left untouched, 14.
Hooded crow, 94.
House martins, 54.
House sparrows, 58-66.

Jackdaws, 74.
Jays, 73.
— "Jitty" Cheshire for Lesser Redpole, 68.

Kestrel, 84-87.

Kingfishers, 80.

"Kit" Cheshire for Redwing, 22.

Larks, 76.

Larks and sparrowhawk, 84.

Linnet, Green-, see Greenfinch. Red-, Goldfinch.

"Longwings" Cheshire for Swift, 77.

Magpies, 73.

Marsh-tits, 41-43.

Martins, House-, 54. Sand-, 55.

Meadow pipits, 47.

Missel Thrush, 13-16, 21, 86.

Mole, 95.

Mouse, Common-, 99-101. Long-tailed, 99.

Nightjars, 78.

"Nicker" Cheshire for Goldfinch, 57.

"Old man" local name for Spotted flycatcher, 49.

Old man, lover of cats, 108

Owls, Barn or White-, 82. Brown, Longeared, and Shorteared-, 84.

Partridges, 89.

Peewits, 91.

"Peggy Whitethroat" Cheshire for Willow-warbler, 33.

Pheasants, 88.

"Pied finch" Cheshire for Chaffinch, 67.

Pied flycatcher, 51.

Pied wagtails, 46, 65.

Pipits, Meadow-, 47. Tree-, 48.

Plants introduced becoming weeds, 8.

Plover, Golden-, 91. Peewits, 91.

Rabbits, 98.

Rats, 97.

— "Red Linnet" Cheshire for Goldfinch, 57.

Redpoles, Lesser-, 68-70.

Redshanks, 92.

Redstart, 27.

Redwing, 21.

Reed-bunting, 71.

Robins, 18, 27-30, 60, 62, 63.

Rooks, 75.

Sand martins, 55.

Sandpipers, 92.

Sedge-warblers, 34.

— "Shercock" Cheshire for Missel Thrush, 13.

Shrews, 99.

Sky-larks, 76.

Snails not found in the garden, 4.

Snipe, 92.

Song Thrush, 16-21, 64, 65.

Sparrowhawks, 84-86.

Sparrow, House-, 58-66.

Sparrows and Owls, 83.

Spotted Flycatchers, 48.

Starlings, 72-73.

Starlings and sparrows, 65.

Stoats, 97.

Stock-doves, 94.

Stonechat, 26.

Swallows, 18, 52-54.

Swallows and Flycatchers, 51, 54.

Swans, 87.

Swifts, 77.

Tern, Black-, 93.

— "Throstle" Cheshire for Song Thrush, 16.

Thrush, Missel-, 13-16. Song-, 16-21. Five kinds feeding together, 22.
Tits, Blue- or Tomtit, 38-41. Coal-, 38, 41-43. Great-, 37, 38, 41. Long-tailed-, 37. Marsh-, 41-43.
Toads not found in the garden, 4.
Tomatoes self-sown, 6.
Tomtits, 38-41, 62, 63.
Treecreeper, 56.
Trees in the garden, 2.
Treepit, 48.
Turtle-doves, 88.
Two nests, one above the other, 94.

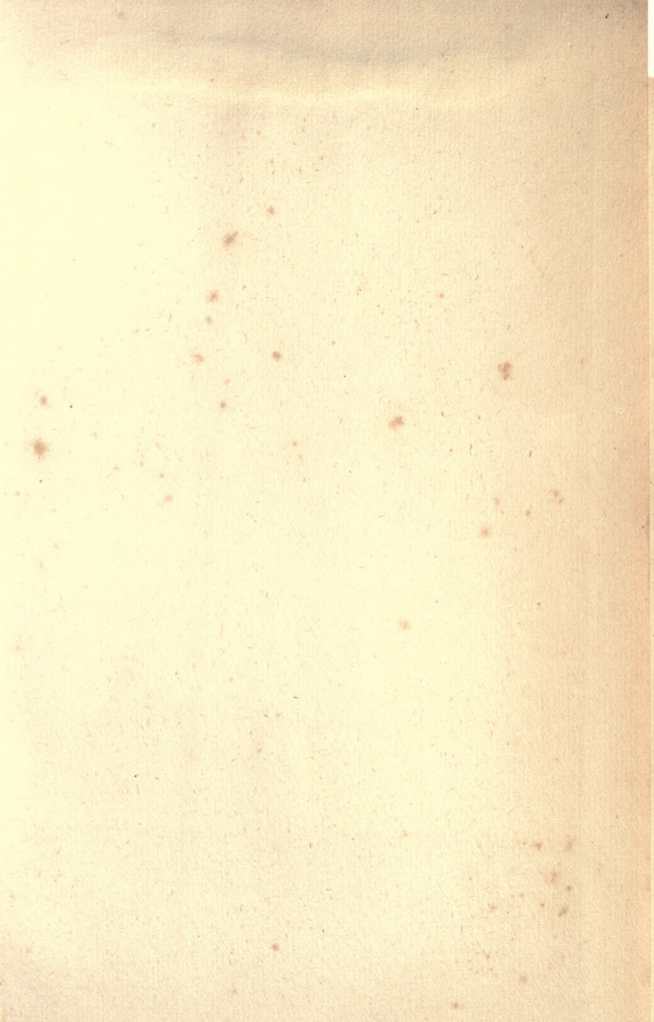
Voles, 99.

Wagtails, Pied-, 46, 47. Yellow-, 47.
Wagtails and swallows, 54.
Warrington Town-hall outdoor aviary, 68.
Waterhens, 90.
"Weasel" local name for Stoat, 97.
Wheatears, 26.
Whinchats, 26.
Whitethroats, Greater-, 30. Lesser-, 31.
Wild duck, 87.
Wild geese, 87.
Willow-warblers, 12, 33.
Woodpecker, Greater spotted-, 79. Green-, 79. Lesser spotted-, 80.
Wood-pigeons, 87.
Wood-wren, 34.
Wren, 18, 43-45.

Yellowhammer, 71.

Yew-tree, Old-, in church-yard, 2.





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